THE HISTORY OF THE VANCOUVER LITTLE THEATRE ASSOCIATION

by

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The thesis covers the history of the Vancouver Little Theatre Association (VLTA), one of the oldest amateur theatre groups in Canada. The subject was chosen partly because of the shortage of informative papers written on the histories of amateur theatre in Vancouver. As there has been very little written on this subject, the majority of the research was done with primary sources, most of which were in the VLTA archival collection at the City of Vancouver Archives.

The VLTA was founded in 1921 by a group of people inspired by the art theatre movement in Europe. The Association proved to be very popular from its inception, and was able to buy a theatre building by its third season. The building was its home base until 1978. The Depression at the end of the 1920s dramatically affected the VLTA, and the company, once financially successful and widely accepted, lost much of its stability and following. From then on, most of the history of the VLTA is a struggle for survival. During the Second World War, the Association helped with the war effort, either by raising money for war charities or by giving performances for servicemen. At the end of the war, professional theatre began to emerge in Vancouver, and the VLTA had much competition. This early professionalism led to the building of Vancouver’s civic theatres in the late 1950s.
and early 1960s, as well as the founding of smaller, alternative, professional theatre companies of the 1970s. The Little Theatre found that it could not compete with these new movements. The Association's position in the Vancouver theatre scene was forced to change.

The Introduction presents a brief overview of the theatrical ongoings in Vancouver before the inception of VLTA, as well as the reasons behind the creation of the Little Theatre. Chapters Two to Five cover the main part of VLTA's history, from its inception in 1921 to the selling of the York Theatre building in 1978. Chapter Six brings up to date the rest of VLTA's history and discusses whether the VLTA succeeded in its original mandates. It also considers why VLTA remained amateur, while other little theatres in Canada turned professional. The thesis will cover the internal workings of VLTA as a company, and its position in the Vancouver Theatre scene in comparison to other theatrical happenings in the city.
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HISTORY OF THE VANCOUVER LITTLE THEATRE ASSOCIATION

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Vancouver Little Theatre Association (also known as the VLTA), one of the earliest community theatre groups in Canada, was established in 1921 and still exists in some form to the present day. The VLTA was a leader in theatre in Vancouver in its early years, frequently providing support for other community theatre groups. It also proved to be an excellent training ground for actors who eventually moved on to theatre elsewhere, either in Vancouver or other centres. Some examples are: Dorothy Somerset, who developed the Theatre Department at the University of British Columbia; Fletcher Markle, a major figure in Canadian radio drama and later a Hollywood director; Thor Arngrim and Stuart Baker, producers for Totem Theatre, one of the earlier professional theatre companies in Vancouver; Norma MacMillan, Thor Arngrim’s wife, who achieved fame as a character voice for radio and animated films, most notably as the voice of Casper the Friendly Ghost; Joy Coghill and Sydney Risk, who created Holiday and Everyman
Theatre respectively, early professional theatre companies in Vancouver; Yvonne Firkins, founder of the very successful Arts Club Theatre of Vancouver; Bruno Gerussi, one of Canada’s best known television actors because of his nineteen years of work on the internationally-broadcast Beachcombers series; Bruce Ward, who created the Act Four Theatrical Agency; and Sharon Pollock, a Canadian playwright now based in Calgary. The VLTA became a source from which a substantial amount of theatrical growth in Vancouver was begun.

The VLTA’s history is at times eventful and exciting, and at other times tedious in its sameness. Many of the same problems plagued the company from its inception through its seventy-year history. Except for the very early years, lack of funds was always an obstacle in its struggle for survival. The York Theatre, which the VLTA owned from 1923 until 1978, remained a burden to the company for many reasons. Nonetheless, the Association succeeded in keeping mainly volunteer community theatre alive in Vancouver for a very long time.

Between 1886, when Vancouver was incorporated as a city, and 1921, when the VLTA commenced, a wide range of theatrical activities entertained the community. The first theatre, Hart’s Opera House (1887), doubled as a roller skating rink when not in use as a theatre space. Theatres erected over the next thirty years served varying functions. Some, such as the Vancouver Opera House built by the Canadian Pacific Railway
(next to the first Vancouver Hotel on the corner of Georgia and Granville), were created for legitimate theatre. Others, such as the two Pantages and two Orpheum theatres built before 1917, were for vaudeville. A third Orpheum theatre, opened in 1927, is the only one of these theatres still in use today.¹

Professional theatre can be divided into three main categories before the 1920s, when the VLTA was begun: vaudeville, stock companies and American/British touring companies. Vaudeville originated in the United States; and when the railway that linked Vancouver to the Northwest States was finished in 1904, the city was added to the touring circuits. According to Robert Todd, theatre historian, "Vancouver had required a rail link...[and] its effect on the theatrical life was not only to facilitate travel for touring performers, nearly all of whom came from the south, but also made Vancouver open to inclusion on the vaudeville circuits that were developing in the Seattle area."² Stock companies too originated from other centres, but then took up residence in Vancouver. (The theatre that the VLTA bought in 1923 was at one time a stock company theatre.) Finally, British and American touring companies frequently visited Vancouver, using the CPR Opera House as their "principal home".³ Vancouver audiences were receptive, both financially and artistically, to the theatrical attractions imported to the city.

Todd believes that by the mid 1910s touring of legitimate theatre was waning in Canada and elsewhere. "Hindsight shows
by that time [1913] theatrical touring in North America was beginning to decline, well before moving pictures had made an impact."4 Nevertheless, touring did not die out completely. Companies kept coming to Vancouver until the Depression in 1929, but seldom thereafter. At the same time, vaudeville was growing in popularity: in 1912, the Vancouver Opera House was converted to a vaudeville house, and between 1908 and 1917 six vaudeville houses were either erected or converted from existing theatre buildings.

Little documentation exists on amateur theatre of this time, with one notable exception. In 1915, six weeks after the opening of the University of British Columbia, a lecturer named Frederic Wood began a student's theatre group called the Players' Club. This club was so successful that it was soon taking its own productions on tours throughout British Columbia.

Another group that put on periodic amateur theatricals was the Vagabond Club. No connection to the later Vagabond Players of New Westminster, this organisation was made up of businessmen and professional people who enjoyed the Arts, and used the club as a way to share their mutual enjoyment. This sort of organisation was not uncommon in Canada at the time. Maria Tippett, in her analysis of the arts in Canada prior to the Massey Commission, states that such groups gathered simply for enjoyment. "It was the doing, the discussing, and the sharing of one's work that mattered to these society ladies,
businessmen and professionals... Achieving financial success or meeting with public approval through their involvement with culture and the arts was not necessary for these well-heeled hobbyists. The Vagabond Club, not specifically interested in theatre, would put on only one play per year. Some members, however, were more interested in starting a separate, full-time amateur theatre group.

Unlike the Vagabond Club and other clubs of its kind, the founders of the VLTA realised that the kind of theatre company they wanted could not exist without audiences, nor without a receptive, volunteer support group. Tippett goes on to analyze this variety of organisation as well:

...most were aware that their activity entailed more than self-fulfilment and the entertainment of their friends. They sensed that they should be reaching outwards, trying to work towards some broader, more general standard. They knew, certainly, that something of this sort had to be done if the public were to be persuaded to buy tickets, paintings, or subscriptions. They were aware as well that their work needed an appealing content to attract an audience in the first place. And above all they knew that the making of culture demanded dedication, enthusiasm, and a good deal of energy not only to create and perform, but also to attend rehearsals... Nor did these groups draw solely upon the business, professional, and upper classes for their members. There was, to be sure, 'the social satellite' and 'the dilettante who delights to dabble in anything that smacks of the Bohemian.' But, as the American Drama critic Gertrude Lerner continued, there was also 'the more spirited amateur who, after a day of work in factory or office, spends his evening in artistic pursuit.'

The founders of the VLTA recognised there was a niche in Vancouver's theatre scene needing to be filled. While many forms of theatre flourished in Vancouver, they were
predominantly professional. And except for the Players’ Club, whose membership was restricted to university students, few opportunities existed for participation of local amateur artists.

The Little Theatre movement was strong in Europe by this time, and had swept the United States. Leaders in this movement included Europeans such as Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, and Max Reinhardt, and Americans such as Sam Hume. The artistic ideals of such leaders inspired this group of people to create their own Little Theatre in Vancouver. As well, the founders were dissatisfied with the type of theatre being offered in Vancouver. Popular theatre made up the majority of productions presented in the city at the time: such as vaudeville, melodrama, and magic lantern shows (the predecessor to moving pictures). The founders recognised the desire among theatre-goers to see, or become involved in, locally produced legitimate theatre. Although founded on high principles, the company later became more of a community theatre forced to bend to the demands of its members and to financial restrictions.

Initially, the VLTA became very popular, probably because it had effectively filled a void in Vancouver’s theatrical scene. It might have remained so, had the Depression of the 1930s not affected it so drastically. The Depression was an important turning point for the Association: from then on, the VLTA never regained its previous stature, and frequently pined
for its early, glorious years.

At certain times, the VLTA held an important rank in the development of theatre in Vancouver, especially during the 1920s and the early 1950s. It never permanently remained on the forefront of theatrical movements in the city, however, as did other community groups such as the Winnipeg, London, or Ottawa Little Theatres, or Hart House in Toronto. The difficulty it had maintaining its stature frustrated the VLTA, rendering it at times almost ineffectual.

Why didn't the VLTA turn professional? The answer probably lies in a conflict between its roots as an art theatre and its objectives as a community theatre. Ultimately, it remained an amateur, community organisation, in order to provide a wide range of opportunities for people to participate in theatre. Although many people went on from the VLTA to professional careers, the Association itself remained ambivalent towards professionalism. And by the time regional theatres were being established elsewhere in Canada in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the VLTA had been overshadowed by a proliferation of amateur and professional groups. Some other little theatres in Canada eventually made successful transitions to professional theatre companies, even regional theatre companies; for example, Winnipeg Little Theatre developed into The Manitoba Theatre Centre (MTC), and the London Little Theatre became Theatre London. These were companies which, unlike the VLTA, had maintained their
dominance in local theatre.

When professional theatre was permanently established in Vancouver in the 1960s and 1970s, the VLTA at first attempted to compete on the same level. It seemed that the Association wanted to fulfil its mandate of being an amateur group, while at the same time command the attention and respect normally given to professional groups. It remained frustrated in these ambitions, which probably caused it irreparable damage. As the theatre scene had changed in Vancouver, so the VLTA had needed to change. When it tried for a number of years to not change, it floundered almost to the point of extinction, until the mid-1980s. At that point, it was given new life by being given a new direction, a new focus, and a new name; the Vancouver Little Theatre Alliance. Now it is a non-producing company, in charge of a theatre space available for other companies.

One thing remained constant throughout most of the VLTA's history: the York Theatre building. The York, located at the corner of Commercial and Georgia Streets, was many things to the VLTA for the fifty-five years of its ownership: a source of income, a drain on finances, a home, a burden, a free place to perform, an expensive place to operate. So much of the history of the VLTA is caught up in the building. It is as if the York was the reason the VLTA was around for so long, as well as the reason it was always thwarted.

This thesis covers the history of the VLTA from its
inception in the early 1920s, to the sale of the York Theatre in 1978. The thesis will examine the internal workings of the VLTA as a company, as well as its position in the Vancouver theatre scene. As very little has been written on amateur theatre in Vancouver, this is primarily a historical paper, a building block for other analyses of Western Canadian theatre history. So much Canadian theatre history has been written about other centres in Canada, and yet so much of Vancouver’s theatrical history has been largely ignored. In recent research done on Heather McCallum’s exhaustive study on Canadian theatre resources for the Directory of Canadian Theatre Research, I discovered an abundance of primary sources on British Columbia theatre history at the city and provincial archives, and in personal collections. This is a new and exciting field, and should not be ignored by Canadian researchers, particularly university graduate students. It is exciting to be on the crest of historical analysis like this and to discover history that has not yet been documented. The object of this thesis, therefore, is to open another door onto the history of British Columbia Theatre by documenting the history of the Vancouver Little Theatre Association.
CHAPTER TWO

The Early Years: 1920s

The concept of a little theatre organisation for Vancouver started with two men, Sam Wellwood and C.A. (Charles) Ferguson. Ferguson, Wellwood and their wives lived in Wellwood's house in Grandview, on the east side of Vancouver. According to the City Directory, Sam Wellwood was a bookkeeper, Ferguson an artist. Both men participated in the Vagabond Club, an informal organisation of professionals who enjoyed the pursuit of the arts. (As mentioned previously, this had no connection to the later Vagabond Players of New Westminster, which was started in 1937.) As Sheila Neville, later president of the VLTA explains; "The Vagabond Club of Vancouver was formed by a group of businessmen who enjoyed poetry, novels and the Arts. They met every Saturday evening in a restaurant at the corner of Seymour and Dunsmuir." Every year, the Vagabond Club would put on a performance of a play written by Club members. Frequently the plays would be performed at the Bursill's Hall on Pender Street. Ferguson's and Wellwood's greatest
interest was theatre, particularly the little theatre movements that were sweeping Europe and invading North America. Charles Ferguson reminisces:

"The Little Theatre movement was then beginning to take hold and make some headway [in the world]. Sam and I were interested and discussed the possibility of such a thing in Vancouver. Reinhardt's intimate theatre, the designs of Urban, Jones, Lee Simonson and the Russian Theatre all interested us and gave us ideas".⁹

Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly, in English Canadian Theatre, agree that international influences were important to the evolution of the little theatre movement in Canada. "The inspiration for the development of a genuinely Canadian Theatre came from the art theatres of Europe...Eschewing commercial ideology and expectations, the Little Theatre movement dedicated itself to innovation and experiment in dramatic production".¹⁰

Wellwood and Ferguson were interested in creating an amateur little theatre similar to those in Europe and the United States. They reacted to the theatre offered them in Vancouver: no variation or participation. The Little Theatre movement, with its new outlook, gave them inspiration to try their own ideas. Their greatest interests lay in the direction of innovation and experimentation, particularly in design. They studied the work of Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia. Ferguson focused his attention on sets and Wellwood on lighting. Another influence for Ferguson was Sam Hume, a director of Drama at the University of California at
Berkeley. Hume had created a versatile set design when he had been with the Detroit Arts and Crafts Theatre. Sheldon Cheney, an analyst of the art theatre, highly praised Hume’s design.

Before describing Hume’s setting in detail, I wish to record my admiration for the impressive results he obtained... The point to be remembered, if one is interested in little theatre and art theatre economics, is this: while gaining superior results artistically, Hume spent for eleven settings not more than the cost of two average settings in other theatres... The permanent setting included the following units: four pylons, constructed of canvas on wooden frames, each of the three covered faces measuring two and one-half by eighteen feet; two canvas flats, each three by eighteen feet; two sections of stairs three feet long, and one section eight feet long, of uniform eighteen inch height; three platforms of the same height, respectively six, eight, and twelve feet long; dark green hangings as long as the pylons; two folding screens for masking, covered with the same cloth as that used in the hangings, and as high as the pylons; and two irregular tree-forms in silhouette. An arch and a large window piece were added later. The pylons, flats, stairs, arch and window were painted in broken colour, after the system introduced by Joseph Urban, so that the surfaces would take on any desired color under the proper lighting.12

The versatility and inexpensiveness of the design suited the budget of the founders of the VLTA.

Ferguson remembers that in the summer of 1921, the two men built a scale-model set based on Hume’s design. They experimented with it, changing the pieces around in order to create sets for the numerous plays they had read. Wellwood lit the model. It suited the budget for a little theatre, and was very adaptable and reusable. Adaptability was important to them, because the prospect of creating a theatre company
with no existing revenue meant that frugality was vital. Although Ferguson and Wellwood came from the Vagabond Club (as did numerous other founding members), the Club did not sponsor the VLTA. As Ferguson explains, "It simply happened that most of our friends who had like interests were members of the Club." 13

As Ferguson and Wellwood became more confident and enthusiastic about their set design and the idea of such a theatre company, they discussed the idea with other like-minded people. They held an exhibition of the set, complete with lighting, at the Wellwood home. According to a brief history of the Association written in 1933, the people who came to the earliest meeting at the Wellwood home became the founders. These included Mr. and Mrs. Wellwood, Mr. and Mrs. Ferguson, H. Bromley Coleman, Mr. and Mrs. H.H. Beeman, G.R. Ward, Mr. and Mrs. R.M. Eassie, and Aubrey Goodall. According to Simmonds, everyone was enthusiastic at the first meeting.

The core group wanted to share the idea with the people of Vancouver, so they arranged to have a public meeting. Sam Wellwood, acting as secretary, began writing letters to people he thought would be interested. As well, there was a paragraph inserted in the Daily Province newspaper, announcing to the public the upcoming meeting.

The meeting was held in the summer of 1921, at the Board of Trade building, corner of Pender and Homer Street. The precise number of people who attended is not known. Ferguson
remembered the names of at least seventeen people who came to the meeting, but knew there were others as well. It was agreed at this meeting that, because enough support was demonstrated, the founders should go ahead.

At the next meeting later that summer, officers were chosen, as follows:

- President: R.L. Reid, K.C.
- Vice President: E.V. Young
- Secretary: S. Wellwood
- Treasurer: E.W. Lamprey
- Directors: H.H. Beeman and H.B. Coleman
- Scenic Director: C.A. Ferguson
- Lighting Director: S.R. Coombes
- Properties and Costumes: G.B.D. Phillips and Mrs. A.H. Douglas
- Music Director: Mrs. A.E. Delong

R.L. Reid, King's Council, was a friend of Wellwood and Ferguson through the Vagabond Club. The latter two asked for Reid's assistance in the Association because, as Ferguson explained in a letter to Reid, "We knew of your interest in literature and thought not only that you could handle a meeting but that you had understanding of the problems we would have to meet." E.V. Young, Vice-President, not at the first meeting held at the Board of Trade, became involved through Mr. Beeman. Beeman had seen Young at the Imperial Theatre on Main Street, in B.C. Hilliam's "Follies", and had invited Young to participate in the Association. B.C. Hilliam was a North Vancouver actor, who wrote and produced local musical revues.

At the preliminary meetings, the founders drew up a list of objectives for the theatre company. For many years after,
this list was reprinted in the programme for each production of the Association:

The object of VLTA is:
(1) To promote the study of Drama
(2) To produce high class plays by British and foreign dramatists, not ordinarily given by travelling companies.
(3) To encourage, and provide facilities for the production of plays by Canadian dramatists.
(4) To develop the arts of costume and scenic design, and stage lighting.  

Meanwhile, two immediate concerns arose for the new Association: finances, and a performance space. The Association agreed to raise funds by having a paid annual membership, a practise common in other community theatres. With nothing to offer but enthusiasm, the VLTA asked the public to buy subscriptions in advance, promising on good faith to have a season of productions.

In order to increase awareness and generate potential funds for the new local theatre, Sam Wellwood wrote an article for the Daily Province describing the Little Theatre movement. By outlining the impact of other such theatres elsewhere in the world, Wellwood wanted to convince Vancouverites of the importance of a similar organisation in their own city, perhaps in part trying to appeal to their desire for cosmopolitanism. Wellwood referred to many of the people involved internationally in the little theatre, such as Appia, Craig and Reinhardt. His attack on the "two-dimensional" theatre of melodrama pointed specifically to stage settings and lighting designs - Wellwood's own main interest:
Community theatres were inspired by a reaction against both an effete romanticism in drama and what was regarded as an outworn convention in scenic representation, namely, the use of painted ‘drops’ or backgrounds in perspective. Towards the close of the nineteenth century the ideal of stage lighting in our commercial theatres was the total elimination of shadows, a thing that does not occur in nature, and the play was so over-burdened with painted flat perspectives with impossible shadows depicted thereon, that the actor himself stood in danger of being regarded as a piece of painted canvas.

He wrote of the successful little theatres of Europe, some of which started as amateur companies and later became professional. But his focus in the article was to point out the importance of the little theatre as an amateur institution. He must have recognised that the city of Vancouver would find it difficult to support a professional company of the likes of the Moscow Art Theatre or the Irish National Theatre in Dublin. He also tried to emphasise the democratic nature of community theatre, describing it as the theatre for everyone:

A noteworthy feature of the little theatre movement is its democratic character and its discouragement of the star system. It is not an affair of one class. It finds room among its workers not only for amateur actors and actresses of ability, but also those whose talents are humbler perhaps, but no less necessary to the perfect ensemble, such as carpenters, scene painters, musicians, seamstresses, ushers, businessmen and so on, each in his separate sphere doing the thing he can for the good of things as they should be. By this means the drama is made once more, as in Shakespeare’s day, a living force in the community, reflecting the significance and beauty of life, which still underlies our drab conventions and voicing also the social tendencies of the time, the dreams and theories which may become the actualities of tomorrow.

In this article, Wellwood introduced the little theatre
movement as it transpired in the rest of the world, and to introduce the Vancouver Little Theatre to its future audiences. He also wanted to get people interested in the Association so they would join, in order to generate needed revenue.

Personal contact proved to be another way of gaining members. Ferguson and Wellwood approached Professor Frederic Wood of the UBC Players’ Club, who eventually directed the first one-act of the VLTA’s first production. Wood, in turn, brought to the Association Dorothy Somerset, a very important early contributor not only to the Vancouver Little Theatre, but to Vancouver theatre as a whole.

Finding a theatre space remained a problem. They had little choice, and little money to spend on rent. They discussed using a converted store, and Ferguson began to design generic set pieces that would fit into such a space. Then, one day in early fall 1921, Charles Ferguson walked by Templeton Hall, on the corner of Pender Street and Templeton Drive.

The door was open and I just walked in. It was a ready made little theatre with [a] stage. I told Wellwood about it and we saw it together. I remember his delight when he found that the lighting system was equipped with a dimmer. He rubbed his hands together, ran his eyes over the overhead lights and began to plan what he would do.¹⁹

Templeton Hall’s location was its biggest downfall and greatest concern to the committee organised to find a theatre space. It was a long distance from downtown Vancouver
(Templeton Drive is two blocks west of Nanaimo Street). As no other acceptable options surfaced, the founders decided to try it.

That began, as Ferguson recalled, many "hectic" weeks of preparation for the scheduled opening on November 3, 1921. "Readings", or auditions, were held at the Board of Trade for the three one-act plays of the first production. Reticence seemed to be the order of the day for these auditions. According to VLTA member D.A. MacGregor, "there was quite a crowd present, but at first all sat back like school children afraid to do anything."20 Once the plays were cast, rehearsals were held downtown, at the Board of Trade, or at the Hall.

Most technical work was done at Templeton Hall. Ferguson hired two carpenters to help him make flats and set pieces. Wellwood and his assistant worked on lights and made frames for gels, and Ferguson designed an appliqué for the front curtain. They all worked in the gallery, a back room and the stage. MacGregor complained that most of the workers were never allowed to use the stage as "Wellwood was always tinkering there with his lights and his gelatin sheets and he would chase us off".21 Jas Leyland, a VLTA member, remembered the early days as a "hive of activity":

Night after night these workers came, working hard to get everything ready for the opening night...In fact we had sometimes too many and it was not easy to find work for all however eager they might be. Most members did something and there was an understood rule in those days that all members not
engaged in a play should assist in any way they found congenial and useful. They were busy times, but each one worked with a will at whatever he or she were best qualified for.\textsuperscript{22}

A fond reminiscence for the members was the meals prepared by Mrs. Wellwood and Mrs. Ferguson. D.A. MacGregor recalled: "A feature of these work nights was the little lunch provided by the ladies and which we ate from dirty hands and in our working clothes."\textsuperscript{23} And Leyland agreed: "One of the features of these work nights was the suppers in the upstairs room generally got ready by Mrs. Wellwood and Mrs. Ferguson. They were most enjoyable, and led to all kinds of discussion, frequently keeping us there until 'the wee sma' hours'..."\textsuperscript{24}

Three one-act plays were chosen for the first production: \textit{Lonesome Like} by Harold Brighouse, directed by Professor Wood; \textit{The Intruder} by Maurice Maeterlinck, directed by Garfield King; and \textit{The Stepmother} by Arnold Bennett, directed by G.H. Warde. (Appendix B contains a calendar of VLTA productions, 1921-78, including dates, plays performed, authors and directors.)

One mishap arose just before opening night. It was discovered at the dress rehearsal for \textit{The Intruder} that the lights not only shone through the windows of the set, they also shone through the walls. The members in charge of flats laid them onto the floor of the auditorium area, and Noel Robinson began painting them. According to Ferguson, "He [Robinson] splashed vigorously and put as much on the floor and himself as he put on the flats. We then had the double
job of cleaning the floor." This displeased the proprietor of Templeton Hall, as he used the space for dances and he was concerned his floor had been ruined.

The first production went ahead with the final touches of paint being put on the flats as the curtain went up. The VLTA President, Mr. Reid, gave an opening speech before the first performance, explaining the Little Theatre's objectives, and expressing a hope that eventually the theatre company would be successful in becoming the city's community theatre.

The reviews by members and the local paper were mostly positive for the first production. The Daily Province described the play's reception as "enthusiastic". (There was no review in the Vancouver Sun.) Special mentions went to The Intruder and to Charles Ferguson's set design. The Daily Province's review concluded:

In spite of the fact that is was the first attempt of its kind in the city, and that it marked the first public appearance of many of the actors, the performance went off very creditably and with thoroughly professional regularity. The members were satisfied as well, as indicated in reminiscences. Praise was specifically offered to Mrs. Lukin Johnstone, who played the granddaughter in The Intruder. Accolades came from other cast members, technical people and the reviewer in the Daily Province. (Mrs Johnstone's husband obviously had great faith as well in her abilities, and in the theatre company - he was the first to buy a subscription membership for the season.) Leyland remembers that the VLTA
members considered the main weakness of *Lonesomelike* to be the cast's poor Lancashire accents. The actors in *The Stepmother* were extremely nervous, noticeably enough to disrupt the performance. Nevertheless, the consensus was that the performances had been successful enough to go ahead with a second production.

Many potential subscribers were much more interested in joining the Association now that it had succeeded in its debut production. This led to a certain amount of initial disorganisation. Many new members wanted roles in the plays, but not enough parts could be made available. The VLTA resorted to establishing memberships of different standings. There were 'Members', restricted to 200 spaces only, and these were the only people allowed to vote in the Association. They had to participate, either by doing technical work, acting, costume, refreshments or box office. The second level was the 'Associates'. They could participate as well, but had no vote. If a vacant space became available at the Members level, it would be filled by someone recommended from the Associate status, on the basis of the amount of assistance he or she had given in the past season. The final level of membership was 'Subscribers', active only as audience.

Membership fees were payment for the season's tickets. The fee was $5.50, which worked out to be $1.00 for each production plus $.50 entertainment tax for the full season. The general public (i.e. non-members) could purchase tickets
for each performance for $1.00. The price stayed constant for many years (sometimes without the entertainment tax).

The VLTA's second production was scheduled for December 15-17, 1921. The one-act plays chosen were Suppressed Desires by Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook, directed by Garfield A. King and David Bridal; The Land of Heart's Desire by W.B. Yeats, directed by Herbert Beeman; and The Lost Silk Hat by Lord Dunsany, directed by A.E. Craddock. Dorothy Somerset made her first appearance in a VLTA production in Suppressed Desires.

The process of production began once again. New costumes and sets needed to be built or found. According to the programmes of the plays, many businesses were generous in their loans, especially furniture stores. The same companies were still lending furniture to the Association more than twelve years later, as the stores were still being acknowledged for furniture and set pieces.

This time, the performances received notices in both local papers. The Vancouver Sun described the plays as "excellent in every respect".28 The Daily Province felt the theatre was "making progress", and that the musical entr'actes between the plays were so good they would be well worth the cost of admission on their own.29

The season continued with three more productions in the New Year, on February 16-18, April 20-22 and May 25-27, 1922. Each production consisted of three one-act plays for three
nights each. For the third production, the McIntyre Quartette, a family musical group, joined VLTA as entertainment for the interludes between the one-act plays. This Quartette continued to perform at VLTA productions for many years.

In May 1922, the Treasurer informed the members that they had ended their first year with a surprising surplus of $150.00. The members enthusiastically decided to forge ahead with a second season. For 1922-23, the VLTA continued to put on one-act plays. This format was used for the first four productions. The reviews in the Daily Province ranged from generally positive to strongly enthusiastic. During this season, the VLTA put on a production of Matches by local author Isabel Ecclestone MacKay. This fulfilled one of the company’s original mandates to support locally written works. The play, positively reviewed in the Daily Province, was described as "amusing and healthy".

The VLTA started to attract attention from other centres. Roy Mitchell from Hart House Theatre in Toronto and Gilmore Brown of the Pasadena Players of California both came to view the Little Theatre in action. According to Jas Leyland, Roy Mitchell’s visit was not a positive experience. Mitchell was asked to assist in directing the upcoming Boccaccio’s Untold Tale. The request turned out to be a mistake; as Leyland put it, it was "a case of 'too many cooks'". One reviewer said of the production that one particular actor was so poorly
directed he gave the most important speech of the play with his back to the audience.\textsuperscript{33} Gilmore Brown's visit, on the other hand, was much more beneficial. Brown and the people of the Vancouver Little Theatre used their time constructively to compare notes on their respective community theatres.\textsuperscript{34}

As a final production of the season, the Association decided to do a full-length play instead of another evening of one-acts. The play chosen was J.M Barrie's \textit{Dear Brutus}, which opened in May 1923. The \textit{Daily Province} described the production as "an artistic triumph".

It is not too much to say that the association in this, its final and most ambitious effort of the season, reached a standard of excellence - at times approaching a professional status - which will place the Little Theatre movement on a permanent footing in Vancouver. If there were those last night who went to Templeton Hall prepared to make charitable allowance for a crude amateur production, they must have been agreeably disillusioned, for, despite handicaps, the comedy was staged with subtle artistry...\textsuperscript{35}

The show was held over, running for a total of six performances. \textit{Dear Brutus} proved that the Association had been accepted by Vancouverites.

The second season did have crises as well. Halfway through the season, the proprietors of Templeton Hall notified the Association that it could no longer use the theatre. After some discussion, the Association was able to convince the proprietors to let them stay at least until the end of the current season. At the end of the season the theatre company had to leave.
Templeton Hall had never been an ideal theatre space anyway. It had been convenient in that it had been available and it required no renovation to be used as a theatre. The seating area of Templeton Hall was level, causing poor sight lines. The heating in the hall was so inadequate that patrons routinely brought blankets to the theatre. The dressing rooms were tiny, as E.V. Young later explained:

The ladies dressing room was a glorified cupboard in one corner of the stage, and the mens' dressing room was above it - a sort of boarded in shelf reached by a ladder. When the stage was in darkness, this trip down the ladder always reminded me of the 'facilis est' quotation so beloved of my Latin master.  

Even so, the Hall was the only option the Vancouver Little Theatre had had up to this point. But when the second season ended, it was time to look for a new home. The theatre company's goal was to find something closer to downtown Vancouver. At first the VLTA considered constructing a new theatre, until estimates showed it would cost nearly $40,000. The Association decided to look for an existing theatre. The Alcazar Theatre on Commercial Drive was mentioned to the committee organised to search for a new theatre.

The Alcazar Theatre had originally been built in 1913 as a recital hall. The architect, John McCarter, also designed the Kitsilano Theatre (now the Russian Community Centre on Fourth Avenue near Arbutus Street), the Georgia Medical Dental building, and the Seaforth Armories. According to an article written in 1986, the building was commissioned by Robert J. McLaren, for Mrs. John Van Harlingen, a music
Developer MacLaren is said to have footed the money for the Alcazar, out of his love for Mrs. V.H. [sic]. She wanted her own place; a recital hall where she could teach, and perform her own concerts. Her husband, reputedly a wealthy lumberman, may not have seen the need for this extravagance.38

According to Ron Wright, the present manager of the building, she "stiffed", meaning that she was poorly received, and within six months the theatre was dark. Wright says, "She still inhabits the theatre, in guilt because she wants to be close to the place..."39 Afterwards, the theatre was home to the short-lived Alcazar Stock Company until 1915, and then it was not used on a permanent basis until the Vancouver Little Theatre bought it eight years later. The Alcazar was not considered a good choice for the Vancouver Little Theatre for many of the same reasons Templeton Hall was unsuitable. It was too far outside of the downtown area. It needed new seating, lighting, and painting, and the heating was inadequate. The positive aspects of the Alcazar were the acoustics and the price of the building. The committee went to visit other theatre spaces, but they found them even less suitable than the Alcazar. In the end, the committee submitted to the members that the Alcazar Theatre was the best choice. The Association bought the theatre for $4250.00, and renamed it the Little Theatre.

The projected estimate for repairs on the theatre stood at over $10,000. As a money making venture, the members were offered the option of buying bonds with issue-bearing interest.
at 6%. This meant that the members could invest money in the Association in the form of bonds, and would be paid 6% interest on their capital investment. When the bonds came due, the members could either collect the money, or re-invest in the Association. The members responded, and the theatre sold enough bonds to begin renovating. The building was painted, but the seats could not be replaced by the beginning of the season. An apology in an early programme asked the patrons to be patient until new seats could be found.

On November 7, 1923, the Vancouver Little Theatre opened its third season, in its own theatre space. The season started with a three-act play, *The Dover Road* by A.A. Milne, directed by E.V. Young. The new theatre space was opened by Mr. Bransby Williams, a well-known American actor visiting Vancouver. A lengthy article describing the evening accompanied the review of the play in the next day's *Daily Province*:

At the close of the overture, Mr. W.G. Murrin, president of the association, stepped before the curtain and gave a brief history of the acquisition of the theatre building and said that, as it now stood, it represented the security to the debenture holders for their bonds. There was no other claim nor mortgage against it. After reading telegrams conveying the best wishes of Hon. Walter C. Nichol [Lieutenant-Governor, and patron of VLTA] and Mr. Vincent Massey the president introduced Mr. Bransby Williams, the veteran exponent of Dickens characters, who had been asked to open the theatre. Mr. Williams said that he was proud to have the opportunity to open a theatre whose members held before them such high ideals for the drama. It especially appealed to him on a night when Vancouver was wrapped in what he had always supposed to be London's particular brand of fog. With a few
felicitous phrases and a reminiscent reference to other days he then declared the theatre open.\textsuperscript{40}

The reviewer, J. Butterfield, also made the point that the opening of a community theatre in its own theatre space was a triumph not only for the Association but also for the people of Vancouver; for without the support of the community, the theatre would not exist.

Beyond any of the founders' expectations, the Association's first decade was a great success. Membership grew: by 1926 the total membership topped 1000, and by the end of the decade it exceeded 1500, in a city of 200,000. The theatre company was so important that the VLTA was able to rearrange the B.C. Electric schedules to make sure there would be trolley cars available for the patrons leaving the theatre at the end of the evening. It became well-known across the country, and was called the "famous Little Theatre" by other theatre companies as far away as Quebec.\textsuperscript{41}

Demands by members soon outgrew the original objectives of the Association. One of the greatest problems facing the Association was the call for roles in plays. The Association began to have problems deciding what its mandates should be. Should the Association exist as an art theatre, created to experiment, for the benefit of the few; or as a community theatre, to entertain, for the enjoyment of many? Should financial considerations outweigh artistic decisions?

The Association quickly realised that three-act plays had more audience appeal than one-acts. For a time, the
Association tried to do both, alternating between the three-act plays to please the audiences, and the evenings of one-acts, to fulfil its mandate as a company prepared to experiment. VLTA found itself in a dilemma; it was trying to remain experimental - as it had originally set out to do - and it was trying to please its enthusiastic audience by putting on plays that would be box-office successes. The one-act plays were ideal for the inexperienced talent, as short plays were not so taxing for an actor or director. The audiences, on the other hand, wanted to see polished performances of well-directed full length plays. As well, the three act plays were more financially successful at the box office than the one-acts.

VLTA chose financial considerations over artistic and developmental, and made the decision to change its main season to full-length plays. This was the first step the VLTA made away from its original inspiration of the art theatres in Europe. It was moving towards a new objective: to be a community theatre for a growing city, aimed at pleasing the audiences rather than being at the forefront of theatre innovation. The resolution to focus on full-evening plays solved one problem, but created others. Now there were fewer opportunities for inexperienced actors to gain practical knowledge without taking on the responsibility of a three-act play. As well, there was less room for experimentation.

The solution came in the form of studio productions,
known as Private Performances. Private Performances, established within the first four years of the Association, were held five times a year, for one or two evenings. They were made up of one-act plays, some locally written, and were for members-only audiences, not the general public. These evenings filled a need in the organisation by providing a testing ground for new talent. All new actors and directors had to be involved in a Private Performance before granted the opportunity to work on a mainstage production. It also let the Association continue to live up to its mandate of encouraging new Canadian plays, and try new innovations in staging, lighting or acting without the burden of potential financial failure. Private Performances permitted the company to become more mainstream and be an experimental theatre as well.

Studio productions such as the Private Performances at the VLTA proved to be a popular solution to this same problem in other little theatres. The UBC Players’ Club was similarly structured, and Sheldon Cheney states that many art theatres did the same.

The Wisconsin Players and other little theatre groups have their workshop stages, whereon members try out their plays before carrying them out to larger audiences. The Moscow Art Theatre has its "studio" for the training of young actors and the try-out of young ideas. The Theatre Guild has arranged quarters in its new building for a school, and already has its "junior" group of workers. It also has followed the system of giving each season two or more special performances for its subscribing members of a play considered too "advanced" for its larger public.42
In the organisation, women outnumbered men approximately seven to one. This made play selection extremely difficult. Many suitable plays were rejected on the basis of the men-to-women ratio in the casts. Play choice was a contentious issue among the members even without the gender-balance problem. In the first few years, there was a play selecting committee, which was a group of five people from the Board of Directors. The system was changed when it proved unpopular with the members. Three of the five on the committee would come from the Association ranks and only two from the Board. Play choice was difficult from other points of view as well. In the 1926-27 season, when the Association was rehearsing its second production, the three subsequent plays already chosen for the season had to be abandoned and new plays found because of scheduling difficulties and royalty conflicts. This caused strain among members. The Association decided it was important to start selecting plays early, even before the previous season had come to an end.

In 1925, VLTA began the *Vancouver Little Theatre Newsletter*. These newsletters included lists of upcoming events, reviews of VLTA and other plays, stories, letters from members and international news of other community theatre companies. The newsletter was published by Murphy and Chapman, a local printing company, at no cost to members. The revenue came from the advertisements.

The mood throughout the early newsletters was dissonant.
Members complained about practically everything to do with the Association: directing, acting, the executive, the plays selected, and quality of performance. One important argument discussed at length in the newsletter was the decision to run the theatre company with no paid artist-director. Some members felt it was extremely important to have a paid director, in order to keep the quality of the productions at a consistently high level. The executive would discuss this possibility, and always return to the decision that the theatre company could not afford to pay a director. This would not always satisfy the members, and the complaints would continue. The company remained without a paid director, nevertheless. By 1928 the general mood of the letters to the editor improved - either because the members were more satisfied with the Association, or there was a tighter editorial rein on the newsletter itself.

Another theme discernible in the newsletter is that of the Association’s condescension towards other community theatres. There were always positive, if somewhat disparaging, comments and best wishes offered to any new community endeavour. As well, many innovations to the Association were announced in the newsletter. One was the creation of a Play Reading Group in 1926. Originally started as a venue for discussion of plays, this group soon turned to play readings, in response to pressure from the members. It gave performers and listeners alike opportunities to widen
Another innovation to the Association was the beginning of the Junior Group in 1929. This group of young people learned about drama and performed in their own productions. This branched off to drama workshops and classes for the adults as well, a venture that proved to be extremely successful. The original performing Junior Group did not venture as well. After a few years it merged with the adult drama classes.

The original impetus for the creation of the Association was a desire to bring a certain kind of theatre to Vancouver. The founders were interested in innovation and experimentation; they did not want to put on superficial plays. Pressure from a growing number of subscribers, however, meant a change of focus. Because of such pressure, the Association was controlled by what the audiences wanted, not necessarily what the originators envisaged. Subscribers looked upon experimentation as something imposed by the select few of the executive. Therefore, to keep the majority happy, the theatre company had to place innovation where it was not intrusive. The most visible part of the theatre company, the mainstage performances, became more mainstream. The demands of the members also meant the Association had to diversify to satisfy its immense following. Some of these diversifications thrived, while others quickly faded or had to adapt to stay alive. It took the force of a Depression to slow the growth
of the company. At the same time, however, an important innovation was to bring new energy to the VLTA: the Dominion Drama Festival.
CHAPTER THREE

Depression and War Years: 1930s and 1940s

The gloriously successful early days of the Association were being replaced with difficult times. The early 1930s were frustrating for the Little Theatre, because of the Depression. Financially, the VLTA's situation was not improving. The theatre building, which had once been an asset, now seemed to be a liability. The theatre company that had become overgrown and well-padded because of prosperous early years was struggling in a time when even streamlined organisations were suffering.

The Depression had a profound effect on the VLTA at the end of the 1920s. Membership dropped from over 1400 to 500 in three years (1929-32). The company worried about funding the mainstage productions and other activities. Pleas were made in the Newsletter, asking lapsed members to re-join. This one was written by H.H. Simmonds, the secretary, in December of 1932;

The VLTA has managed to struggle through three difficult seasons of hard times, but if some great effort is not made to either increase revenue, reduce expenses, or do both, it will be very
difficult to make a successful finish to the present season...While this position is serious, it is by no means hopeless, but I do wish that the ex-members, and other friends, would realise this season's importance and make an effort to take out a membership to help the good work along.43

How could the VLTA be so affected by the Depression? All organisations were beleaguered by the tough economic times, and an Association based on volunteer work for the primary purpose of entertainment was prime to succumb. Some members found the five-dollar membership fee difficult to pay, at a time of great economic stagnation. The problem also lay in the success the theatre company had achieved the previous decade. With few setbacks during the 1920s, the Association had quickly flourished, well beyond expectations. There had never been difficult years of early troubled financial times during which the company could learn to curb excessive growth. Because of this, the company had become overextended.

When the Depression came, the VLTA was completely unprepared, and not ready to suddenly change tactics. Many Canadian Little Theatres had begun near the end of the 1920s, and had not appreciated the number of prosperous years the VLTA had enjoyed. The other theatre companies had therefore started streamlined and remained that way. Vancouver Little Theatre did not conform quickly enough to avoid being lashed by the Depression. Its early success amplified its downfall - the VLTA always compared its lean years to the good years, and did not try to find satisfaction in its later situation. Anger is evident in general correspondence: anger at
subscribers who were not returning to the Association. The contagious optimism of the early 1920s was replaced by deep disappointment and cynicism, feeding the growing dissatisfaction among subscribers and active members alike.

Many responsibilities became difficult to execute, because the finances were not there to fulfill them. A great number of the notices, newsletters and minutes for meetings reveal an undercurrent of despair of the possible loss of the theatre company as a whole. What should the members do? No one attempted to find outside financial help, perhaps because no one really anticipated the Depression, and possibly from a sense of pride: the company did not want to admit defeat.

Another history of the company written by an unidentified member explains the situation:

As with so many other organisations the depression hit the Little Theatre so quickly, or the directors hoped that it was only temporary, that they did not shorten sail soon enough to meet the storm... The public seat sales fell off sharply and had a serious effect on the financial situation...by the middle of 1931 old man depression seemed to have a stronghold on society, and VLTA, like most other organisations, was suffering from despondency or nerves, and the eleventh [season] proved to be the most erratic season in the association's career [to date].

The instability of that year was exemplified by the shifting of the Board of Directors for the 1931-32 season:

At the annual meeting J.P.D. Malkin was elected President during his absence from Vancouver, and on his return was unable to accept the honour, so E.V. Young, who had been elected Vice-President, was made president and Percy Gomery was appointed Vice-President. A.J. Greathed was elected Secretary, but later resigned, to be succeeded by G. Roy Kievill. G.F. Scott was elected Treasurer, soon to resign,
but on J. Barraclough, who had been appointed in his stead, leaving town Mr. Scott again took over the duties. The Directors elected were: Mrs. E.B. Clegg, Mrs. T.M. Ramsay, G.A. King, J.T. Flanigan, J. Barraclough, F. Johnstone and G.R. Kievill, but after the resignation of Mr. King, Mr. Greathed, and Mr. Barraclough, G. Hayward, Mrs. E.A. Woodward and H.H. Simmonds were appointed to fill the vacancies. 45

The people's shifting interests in the company likely reflected their struggle to find and keep gainful employment.

The 1931-32 season was important because of the growing possibility of a national theatre festival. The Dominion Drama Festival (DDF), sponsored by the Governor-General Lord Bessborough, intrigued the Vancouver Little Theatre, and it helped to inject fresh energy into the VLTA and theatre in Canada in general. In the fall of 1932, Governor-General Lord Bessborough made a tour of Western Canada. Although not a tour concerned particularly with Canadian culture, Bessborough took time to speak with people involved in community theatres in the western provinces. He went to the Vancouver Little Theatre to watch a performance on September 8, 1932. For the occasion, the Association remounted Outward Bound. At the end of the evening, Lord Bessborough went on stage to speak to the audience.

Lord Bessborough was so enthused with the production that he kindly consented to address the audience from the stage. Then he emphasised the importance of the little theatre movement in Canada, and urged all members of the community to support the little theatre in its worthy effort to 'keep the flag flying for legitimate drama in Canada'. His Excellency said that he was using his personal influence in bringing together all little theatres in Canada into a National Organisation with an
annual Drama Festival. When Bessborough returned to Ottawa, he made good on his personal influence. He and Vincent Massey, whom Bessborough had made Chairman of the Dominion Drama Festival (DDF) and Col. Henry Osborne, who was Honorary Director, made plans for this national event. The first step toward the festival was the renowned meeting of October 29, 1932, held by Bessborough at Rideau Hall in Ottawa, at which he presented the idea to representatives of community theatres of Canada. Percy Gomery, President of the Vancouver Little Theatre Association and representing the largest amateur theatre group in Vancouver, was invited to the meeting. The concept of the DDF was well accepted by those who attended.

Bessborough and Massey created a format for the Festival. The first phase would be provincial eliminations, and then a final competition held in Ottawa. Each province needed a representative to take care of organising the provincial elimination round. Henry Osborne gave the responsibility of British Columbia to Percy Gomery, as he had been present at the meeting in Ottawa. This was much to the chagrin of Major L. Bullock-Webster, president of the British Columbia Drama Association based in Victoria. Bullock-Webster had met with Lord Bessborough on the latter’s tour of Western Canada, and Bessborough told Bullock-Webster he would be a good choice as Provincial Representative. Bessborough sent a note back to Vincent Massey in Ontario, proposing this. The note
unfortunately never made it to Osborne, the one responsible for choosing representatives. Ignorant of what had passed between Bullock-Webster and Bessborough, Osborne asked Gomery to head up the province's responsibilities. This led to many difficulties and embarrassments, mostly on the part of the DDF organisers, but eventually all was resolved. The problem was partly solved by letting Bullock-Webster have a Vancouver Island elimination round before coming to the final provincial elimination in Vancouver.

The Vancouver Little Theatre had its own eliminations before the British Columbia Regional Finals, in the form of two Private Performances, held on March 16 and 17, 1933. The adjudicator was Mrs. Jessica Foote from New York. Frederic Wood recommended her as an adjudicator. The first evening's performance was Lonesomelike, directed by Mrs. J.G. Gibson, and Campbell of Kilmhor directed by C.J. Lennox. The second evening consisted of Boccaccio's Untold Tale, Back to Methuselah and Helena's Husband, directed by G.F. Scott, Dorothy Somerset and Mildred Battle, respectively.

According to the practice in British drama festivals, the adjudication adhered to a rigid formula. The performances were judged under three main headings - acting, production and stage presentation. Under acting, marks were given for characterisation, audibility of speech, tone and emphasis, and gesture and movement. Production qualities marked were interpretation, team-work, pace and sense of climax. Stage
presentation dealt with scenery, properties, lighting and makeup. Fifty percent of the mark went to characterisation, thirty-five to production and fifteen to stage presentation.

Three of the five plays received high marks. *Campbell of Kilmhor* placed third with 80%, *Boccaccio’s Untold Tale* second with 85%, and *Back to Methuselah* placed first with 87%. Jessica Foote’s comments for this last play were full of praise. She made mention of the difficulties of the part of the Serpent, but said it was done “intelligently”. The costume itself was difficult to create - and not easy to wear!

[The] snake costume was quite a challenge - Bea [Wood] bought a set of men’s long underwear, made a cap in the shape of a ski helmet and attached it to the neck. This was all painted in diamond pattern, bronze-greenish etc. Yards of sacking were bought, sewn circular, [and] stuffed with excelsior and painted. Every night of production, Bea would proceed to the stage before curtain, get into position (legs thrust into the sacking snake tail - 39 ft long) and be sewn into position! The tail was draped over and around the stylised tree. The stage manager was always most worried about fire - with Bea sewn in, there was no way she could help herself if any emergency arose. Green and purplish light and face makeup were used [as well].

*Back to Methuselah* then went to the Lower Mainland eliminations, where it also placed first. It continued on to the B.C. Regionals, where it was selected to represent the province for the Dominion Drama Festival finals in Ottawa, April 24-29, 1933. The cast had performed the play three times in eight days for three separate competitions, and had won every time. (*Boccaccio’s Untold Tale*, second place to *Back to Methuselah* in the VLTA’s own eliminations, went on to the British Columbia Drama Festival. It won first place as
well as the Victoria Cup, against twenty-four other productions.)

The cast of *Back to Methuselah* went to Ottawa for the DDF finals. They competed against twenty-three other casts from across Canada, plays both in English and French. They placed third overall and second for plays in English. The play that won the Bessborough Trophy for best production was *The Man Born to be Hanged*, put on by the Masquers Club of Winnipeg.

The organisers of the DDF had decided, before the festival began, that they would have three prizes - the Bessborough Trophy for the best play overall, an award for the best play in English and another for the best in French. This, unfortunately, caused some difficulty in the first festival, because *The Man Born to be Hanged*, the play that won top prize and first overall, received both the Best Play in English award and the Bessborough Trophy, and the VLTA won nothing. This caused a slight problem, as other groups felt that Winnipeg should not have received both: that Vancouver Little Theatre, who placed second in the English language category, should have received the Best Play in English award. Eventually, the rules were changed, and the Bessborough trophy was given as the award for the best play overall, and the other two trophies were then given to the next two best plays, one for a play in English and one for a play in French. After the 1933 DDF was over, The Best Play in English award was quietly taken away from the Winnipeg Masquers and given to the
Vancouver Little Theatre, "...with as little publicity as possible".49

The VLTA represented British Columbia at the DDF on two other occasions before World War II. (The DDF ceased operating during the war.) The next year, 1934, the VLTA went to the DDF finals with *Elizabeth the Queen*. In 1937, it went in tandem with the Strolling Players of Vancouver - the VLTA doing *The Last War* and the Strolling Players performing *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. In 1935 the Embassy Players of Vancouver went to the DDF; in 1936 it was the Progressive Arts Club of Vancouver; 1938 was the Beaux Arts Theatre of Victoria, and in 1939 it was the Nanaimo Dramatic Society. The VLTA had one other chance to compete during these years, but for reasons discussed later, did not go.

It was obvious to the Association that the amateur theatre festivals were popular. In 1932-33, over twenty groups had competed in the BCDA festivals, as well as nine in the BC Regionals for the DDF. The Vancouver Little Theatre Association decided, as the leading amateur theatre group in the province, to hold its own festival competition during the following season, 1933-34. This festival was to be separate from both the BCDA and the DDF.

The first VLTA Drama Festival was held December 15 and 16, 1933. It was open to all amateur theatre companies of British Columbia, except the VLTA. The festival was adjudicated by Marjorie Reynolds, Dorothy Somerset and Leonard
Miller, all from the Vancouver Little Theatre Association.
The participants for the first annual festival were the Madys
Pridmore Brown School of the Spoken Word, the Mountain View
Players Club, two from the Miller Clay Studio of Dramatic Art,
the Forbes-Robertson Players of Victoria, and the Dadye
Rutherford Dramatic Club. This festival had a good response,
and the VLTA competitions continued for at least another four
years.

The VLTA was becoming well-known, but not always to its
best advantage. With the successes of the two teams at the
DDF and the BCDA festival in 1933, the problems concerning
Major Bullock-Webster, and the 1933 DDF Best Trophy in English
sensation, the name of the Association was certainly
newsworthy that year. In his President’s Report at the end of
the year, Percy Gomery tried to look on the bright side of the
situation.

Even aside from the distinguished notice brought to
us by our teams competing outside the city, we feel
that our publicity, in the matter of quantity, was
about all that could be desired. All of it was not,
again as usual, complimentary but it nevertheless
kept the name of the Little Theatre before the
public, so that, all in all, we feel that the ground
is in fair condition for as large or larger
membership.50

Even so, membership numbers remained unsatisfactory
during the years of the Depression. The shortage of money was
a problem for the Association; it depended on membership to
bring in revenue. The membership dues were not separate from
the members’ tickets; therefore the Association could not make
more money from members after they had bought a membership. The advantage to this style of membership, of course, was that the Association could get money at the beginning of the season, and be certain of the size of the houses for the coming year. From this information, the Association was able to tabulate the number of evenings to put on each play.

During the Depression years, the number of performances per production decreased. In 1926, each play averaged five performances. By the 1932-33 season, the plays were being performed only two or three times each. By 1935-36, the plays were performed one night only. That same season, they put on four plays; the next season only three.

Not everything was bad news for the Association. There had been growing a feeling of disenchantment within the Association before the Depression, but as the struggle for survival became more acute, the members attempted to pull together. They were successful in part - the support for the DDF eliminations and performances in 1933 was so noticeable, that the president made mention of it in his Annual Report.

...I am far from being above appreciating the spirit -- in some ways the new spirit -- of co-operation and agreement which has been evident. At the initial public production the membership was appealed to that they sink all personal feelings and disagreements in loyalty to the Theatre. That this appeal found a response was nowhere more manifest than at the Elimination contest we held to choose our team for the Dominion Drama Festival. Five plays were prepared and faithfully performed. Each producer naturally hoped to win, and the result left much room for divergence of opinion, yet when the Adjudicator announced the result nothing but good feeling was evident. Every one of the defeated
teams became a supporter of its successful rival, which we have all been delighted to watch in its progress from one victory to another.51

Perhaps this camaraderie helped give the theatre company the motivation to combat the ravages of the Depression. The members of the VLTA, at this point, were proving to themselves that they were survivors, a prevalent theme throughout the rest of the VLTA’s history. Gomery continues:

I feel that the out-going Board [of Directors] has accomplished one thing, viz; the laying permanently of that mournful ghost which has haunted our corridors at each of our new years to whisper tragically that the Little Theatre is going to the dogs or is about to fold up and die.52

It seems that the fifteenth season was a watershed year for the VLTA. There is mention of the Little Theatre building being sold to a Mr. McEwen, a film distributor who wanted to use the theatre as a moving picture house. The Secretary’s Report at the end of the 1934-35 season states: "For a time the building was a distinct liability, but a satisfactory sale immediately turned it into an asset and more than provided against all outstanding indebtedness, including the Association’s debentures."53 As far as can be ascertained, McEwen had a mortgage with the VLTA. The Association had difficulties with Mr. McEwen, because he did not make payments on time. In the minutes of the Advisory Committee’s meetings, Mr. McEwen’s name is mentioned frequently, generally on the topic that no one can seem to get in touch with him, and when contact is made, he promises to make payments (which are generally in arrears), but he does not. At one point, there
is mention of suing Mr. McEwen. It seems that McEwen was proprietor of the theatre, and he would then rent it out, and was in arrears on his payments on the theatre because the tenants of the theatre were not paying him. It was a continual problem for the Association for the remainder of the year.

Notwithstanding, the theatre company needed to take care of other business, such as the productions of its regular plays, and the new problem of finding a new theatre or renting another for current productions. Searches for new theatre spaces were mentioned in the minutes of the early months of the season, but as the running of the season continued, more time was taken up on actual production, rather than looking for a permanent new home. In order to put on a season, the theatre company rented theatre spaces. That season, the Association put on four plays. The first three were put on at the Stanley Theatre, on Granville Street. The first choice had been the Empress Theatre, as the Stanley did not have proper dressing rooms and washrooms, and there was a restriction on the choice of plays. The cost of renting the Empress turned out to be prohibitive, at about $300 for a dress rehearsal and two performances. At one point the Advisory Board decided to consider the Point Grey Junior High School auditorium. Then H.H. Simmonds, a member of the Board, talked with the proprietor of the Stanley Theatre, who seemed interested in having the Association perform there. He
suggested that the first $125 go to the Theatre, the next $250 go to the Association, and the rest be split fifty/fifty. This was agreeable to the Association, so on those terms it was decided to have the performances at the Stanley.

The theatre could seat 1225 patrons. The Association held all its Stanley performances on a Monday, with the dress rehearsal the day before. An interesting note is that all the programmes for this season were much glossier and more expensive than they had been when the Association was at the Little Theatre.

The last performance of the 1935-36 season was held at the Auditorium at the University of British Columbia. As early as December, the University had offered the Auditorium to the Association. The Association decided, however, not to perform any plays at the University until after the March production. The last play of the season, Mary of Scotland, was performed for two nights.

The VLTA's entry for the B.C. Regionals that year was Lazarus Laughed. The Association was invited to take the production to the final DDF competition in Ottawa. Unfortunately, because there was not enough money, the Association had to turn down the opportunity. The regional runner-up, Waiting For Lefty produced by the Progressive Arts Club, went in its stead, and placed second at the Finals.

The next season the Association returned to the Little Theatre on Commercial Street. The previous year's sale of the
building fell through. For the next few years, the theatre company's connection to the theatre building is obscure. The VLTA still owned the building, but the building was under a leasing contract situation: in other words, even though the VLTA owned the building, the theatre was only available to the Association for a certain number of days per year. If the VLTA wanted to use the building for more days of the year, it needed to pay rent for the space. This is explained in more detail in the next chapter.

The theatre had been renovated, and now contained film projection equipment. To raise money, the theatre was advertised as a rental space, for either film or stage productions. In the VLTA's first season back at the theatre, 1936-37, only three productions were mounted. The first, If This Be Treason, directed by Dorothy Somerset, had an enormous cast of forty-one people. The other two had much smaller casts. It seemed in this first year back at the theatre, the Association tried not to over-extend itself.

A perennial difficulty still plagued the theatre company: choosing suitable plays for each season. Not everyone was pleased with the plays. Yvonne Firkins aptly described the divergence of opinion:

Here are opinions about two recent productions which brought forth a lot of comment: of Mice and Men - "Grand, give us some more like that." "Horrible, disgusting." "I had to take my family out. This is the last time I shall buy a membership." "Finest play ever done in Vancouver." Of The Guardsman - "Tripe." "Most attractive play I've seen for years." "Not worth seeing." "Brilliant production,
brilliantly acted." "Rotten."

Such widely different opinions are expressed about every play. For this we should be thankful, for only among free peoples can theatres produce what they like, and audiences say what they like.54

It was a frustrating situation for both the public and for members of the Association. Sometimes this irritation would spill over into the newspaper.

A meeting was held a few days ago to discuss the future of the Little Theatre in Vancouver and there was some pretty plain speaking regarding the causes of its apparent decline. The citizens of our fair village came in for some hard knocks for their lack of support for the various offerings and the well-to-do were berated for their failure to maintain one of the oldest few cultural efforts provided for enjoyment and intelligent development of the people. It was significant that no mention was made of the quality of offerings or of the type of play presented by the players.

Yet it seems to me that it is rather a waste of time to enter into long discussions about the apathy of people in not patronising the performances. It is rather like the parson who laments that his congregation is getting smaller and attributing this to the wickedness of the world rather than to his own shortcomings. The churches would be filled every Sunday and the SRO sign would be posted at the doors if the service were appealing enough and the sermons were provocative and inspiring.55

Then the Second World War began. Mention of the war in the programmes is not predominant at the beginning of the war - who knew how all-encompassing the war would become? As well, the patrons were coming to the theatre for entertainment, for escape, not to be reminded once again of the devastation that was affecting their lives. The theatre company did not immediately get involved in the war effort. This could be because no one knew how long the war would last. Perhaps as well, it was in a state of disbelief that the world
was actually at war again. During the first year of the war, the theatre was being renovated extensively: the old wooden seats were replaced with upholstered spring chairs, the ventilation system was replaced, the proscenium arch was updated, and the walls and ceiling were lined with acoustic tile. The theatre was given a new name as well: it was now called the York Theatre. The reasons behind the choice of name? It was short, which meant it was cheaper than a long name to put on a billboard and in neon. The renovations were greatly appreciated; the theatre became much more comfortable. The acoustics, which had always been good, were now considered by reviewers to be almost perfect. One reviewer also noted it was refreshing to sit through a performance without being disturbed by the creaking of the old chairs.

With renovations complete, the theatre re-opened for a performance of Yes, My Darling Daughter on February 8, 1940. His Honour The Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. Eric Hamber were present for the performance. The reviews, although agreeing on the comfort of the seats and the quality of the performance, could not decide on the size of the audience. The News-Herald, on Friday February 9, the day after opening, said that it was a "distressingly small audience". The Vancouver Sun said on the same day: "A representative audience filled the now comfortable theatre to capacity." Nevertheless, it was generally considered that the renovations improved the theatre. "This marked improvement in the theatre
will be welcomed by all lovers of the legitimate drama and there is no doubt that under the new conditions members of the association will be imbued with fresh vitality in their aim of producing the best plays and upholding the time-honored traditions of the stage.⁵⁸

After the first year of war and the Association’s nineteenth season were both over, the VLTA was able to announce to its members that it had succeeded in donating five hundred dollars directly to war charities. This began a drive within the Association to help the war effort, which succeeded in benefitting the war and the Association at the same time.

The next season, the theatre chose to raise money for the war by using sponsors. As a fund-raising scheme, a sponsor would buy a number of memberships from the Association at the normal price, then sell them to its own members at a higher rate. The Association benefitted because they could sell all the tickets for a performance. The theatre company’s first sponsor was the Mount Pleasant Lions Club, and soon other organisations joined in. The connection between the Vancouver Little Theatre and the Mount Pleasant Lions Club was a long and happy one. Even after the war, when the Little Theatre was breaking its ties with other sponsors, it maintained its links with the Lions Club. As Jessie Richardson said after the war, "we feel we cannot discard [the Lions Club] like an old shoe which is of no more use to us, after all the years of happy association which we have had."⁵⁹ It was a money-making
scheme for both the theatre and the sponsor, who was also raising money for the war effort.

The theatre company had a desire to carry on, despite the difficulties created by the War. It now had a greater calling to inspiration: keeping morale up during the war, not only among the active members, but the audience members as well. Comedies were prevalent during the War. As one VLTA programme stated, "Comedy, occasionally, is not only welcome but very necessary these days to help us to maintain our sense of proportion as well as our sense of humour." Maintaining a sense of proportion was true not only in Vancouver, but in other parts of the world as well:

The British Government have found from the experience of their first war years that it pays to encourage amateur Drama. In times of restricted recreational activities, anything that will take people out of themselves, even for a little while, will send them back to their jobs with renewed pep. This applied to those both actively interested in the drama and the audience.

This was motivation enough for the VLTA to persist in the dark days of the War.

As the War continued, the Association wanted to do even more for the cause, and pushed its own board of directors to help provide theatre performances for servicemen. During the 1942-43 season, for example, with the help of the Service Shows (a group dedicated to bringing entertainment to the troops), the VLTA toured Arsenic and Old Lace to some military bases in B.C.

In its final programme of that same season, the VLTA
reflected that, at the outset of the season, it had doubted it would be able to put on its customary quota of five productions. It succeeded in doing so, and within a year the VLTA was commenting on the major growth of the Association.

It has been interesting to watch our audiences grow in the last few years. We are not sure if it is because we are improving or that people are just getting used to us but we feel quite proud of the attention we are receiving. On hearing that the Montreal Repertory Theatre gives seven performances of each of its five plays we felt rather deflated, but when we learned that the theatre holds 210 in place of our 450 we bounced right back, especially when we consider the difference in population between the two cities.62

It seemed that, for the VLTA, the War was stimulating growth, and it was getting back some of the feeling of its old glory days.

From the successes of the early years to the very bad times during the Depression, to a renewed organisation, the Association had experienced a great deal. An article on the Vancouver Little Theatre in 1936 captured the plight of the Association in one sentence: "[It] had high aims, and merely to survive was not one of them."63 The VLTA was more sober now, more mature. It had also proven to itself and others it was a survivor.

The Association would soon face new challenges. The end of the war was imminent, as was the VLTA's twenty-fifth anniversary. To succeed, or even to survive, it needed to be ready to change. Although the VLTA had had to struggle simply to survive, it had risen to the stature of the leading amateur
theatre company of Vancouver. Other less experienced theatre companies looked to the VLTA for guidance, leadership and resources. Perhaps the VLTA did not have the following it wished, but it had a reputation to uphold.
CHAPTER FOUR

After the War: 1940s and 1950s

The Second World War was over. War efforts of the city of Vancouver were now being refocussed towards recreating a way of life left behind six years earlier.

At the Vancouver Little Theatre, supporting the war effort had helped to maintain a sense of purpose. The VLTA had a responsibility to buoy the spirits of the people of Vancouver, provide cultural experiences for the civilian population, and entertain troops stationed nearby. To do so, it needed to stay afloat through the war years. Once the war was over, a general feeling of concern permeated the company that there might not be a continued interest in community theatre. Looking at its past history, the VLTA had cause to be concerned as it entered a new phase.

The first phase of the Association, during the 1920s, had definitely been its heyday, but had given way to bad times during the Depression of the 1930s. The sense of purpose provided by its war effort had pulled the VLTA out of its slump. With the war over, the future of the VLTA was unclear.
Would the theatre return to the glorious times of the 1920s, or to the constant financial struggles of the 1930s? The Little Theatre, with great tenacity, chose to persevere after the war in the hope that the people of Vancouver would include the VLTA in their new lives.

The Mount Pleasant Lions Club, once the war was over, decided to continue to sponsor evenings at the VLTA. During the war, the Lions Club sponsored one night per production, which increased to two in the spring of 1945, just after the cessation of hostilities in Europe. The Lions Club sold season's tickets to the people in their own organisation for $6.25, then gave the $5.00 membership fee to the VLTA, and kept the rest. This enabled the VLTA to schedule a minimum of three performances per production. The theatre company found sponsorship so lucrative that it actively sought other patrons as well, such as the Venture Club, the Beta Sigma Phi Sorority, the Business and Professional Women’s Club, the University Women’s Club, the League of the Empire and the YWCA. Unlike the Lions Club, most of these organisations sponsored performances on an ad-hoc basis. As other sponsors became interested, more performances were added, and the Association was able to put on five performances per production.

Sponsorship quickly became a contentious issue for the artistic aspect of theatre production. Some members felt that sponsorship restricted its choice of plays. In an address to
an unidentified discussion group, Mrs. Jessie Richardson, President of the VLTA for 1948-49, expressed her - and the Association's - feelings on the sponsorship dilemma:

We needed help and they needed help, so it became a mutual aid society, but, it restricted our choice of plays. Sponsors do not bring the public who want to see a living stage play[::] their public has to buy tickets and it is going to use those tickets to get its money's worth, which means that you use box office plays...we had to cut practically all our plays to prudish society's ideas of decency.64

When the Association realised it might be able to continue with five performances per production without sponsors, it decided to go without. As stated in the earlier chapter, it chose not to completely cut its ties with its oldest ally, but as Mrs. Richardson said, the company would no longer conform to the Lions Club's restrictions:

...they are to be warned right at the beginning of the season that our program is not going to be restricted in their favour, they have to take experimental and educational plays as we see fit to include them in the program, and I believe we have educated them to the point where they will not rebel and will stay with us...[we are still playing] five nights, which means that our audiences[,] even those who only used to come because they had to, are becoming theatre conscious, and appreciate the plays for their true worth, living pictures of assorted phases of life.65

Before the decision was made to sever relations with sponsors, there would be acknowledgements in each programme of the sponsors for the production and their involvement (i.e., which nights were they sponsoring, what was the sponsor using the money for), as well as general advertising to the public for more sponsors. During the next season, 1948-49, there is
little or no mention of sponsors in the programmes. The Lions Club is mentioned infrequently, and there are no more requests for other sponsors.

This did not last long, however. Within two or three years, the appeals again appeared in the programmes, as did names of sponsors other than the Lions Club. The theatre company obviously could not survive without the sponsors, even if sponsorship did restrict the choice of plays. In fact, a representative from the Lions Club attended a VLTA board of directors meeting early in the 1951-52 season. He not only offered financial assistance to the theatre company, but also gave instructions to the theatre company on what was and was not acceptable:

Dr. Barton, representing the Lions Little Theatre Committee, met with the board of directors to offer the sponsorship of the Lions as in past years. Dr. Barton voiced the complaint that the York Theatre was unattractive and that any brightening up would receive the support of the Lions. He also asked that the Vancouver Little Theatre not sell memberships in the foyer of the York Theatre at five dollars ($5.00) as the Lions sell their tickets for six dollars and twenty-five cents ($6.25). He was assured that this would not happen. He also requested that October 5th be not a performance date as the Lions would be out of town on this date. Then Dr. Barton suggested that the last production date be not so late in the season. Mrs. Firkins [president of VLTA for the first half of the 1951-52 season] told Dr. Barton that there would be only five productions this season and that any special events that might occur would be within that time. It was suggested by Dr. Barton that some attention be given to the heating of the York Theatre. Dr. Barton said...that if estimates of the cost of a carpet for the York Theatre were given to them...they perhaps would help to finance this important item.66
This situation illustrates well the dilemma in which the Little Theatre found itself - the struggle between idealism and practicality, financial or otherwise - which is reflected frequently in the fifteen years following the war.

The Association had many dreams for a successful theatre company with a large membership, financial freedom to do anything it wanted, as well as a centrally located theatre building which would attract even more theatre-goers. The facts were that the VLTA had a small membership which hovered somewhere around 500, insufficient financial support, a theatre space far away from the centre of a city most of whose inhabitants seemed disinclined to travel the distance to go to the York Theatre, and a reliance on sponsors which restricted its choice of plays. Despite this, the theatre company, in the face of constant frustration, still dreamed it could be popular with the general public in Vancouver. Perhaps one day it would have that coveted centrally located theatre space, if it really believed it would happen.

The theatre company had many plans for what it needed in a theatre space. The VLTA wanted a new or newer building that would incorporate all aspects of the Association - scene shop, rehearsal and studio space, workrooms, theatre, office, social area (i.e. a green room), all within easy access of the audiences and close to transit lines, in an appealing, more accessible part of town. As it was, the Association was sprawled across Vancouver. The York Theatre was on the east
side, the workrooms, rehearsal space and office were spread around on the west side, the offices either in the same place as the workrooms, downtown, or in a local music store. Nor were any of the spaces (other than the theatre itself) very permanent. After the war, the workrooms were moved three times in two years.

In the fall of 1946, an all-purpose space was offered to the Association. Mr Lester Prosser, a miner, offered the building at 1147 West Broadway to the theatre company, free of charge for five years. His generosity perhaps was inspired because his wife was acting in the VLTA plays. Although the Association accepted Prosser's offer, for reasons unknown the building was never actually used. Perhaps it did not pass a fire marshall's inspection for use as a theatre, or the zoning regulations would not allow a theatre space there, or perhaps Lester Prosser backed out of the deal. In any event, the VLTA had to move to another, less desirable, location at Moose Hall, 1021 West Hastings. By 1948, the VLTA was down to one rehearsal room at 603 West Hastings, which Jessie Richardson described as

...most inadequate. Often three major productions are overlapping one another, and studio productions of three one act plays have to be squeezed in odd times. Group meetings have to be held in houses or small office space, which is very unsatisfactory. I know there is the argument that if the members are keen they will not mind where the activity is carried on so long as they are doing something connected with theatre, but I don't agree. I believe unity counts for a great deal in the success of any organisation, all work should be carried on under one roof in that way making it the home of
The York Theatre could not be used for such a purpose. As is was far from the city centre, it was not a desirable choice anyway, but it was unavailable for other reasons. The theatre had been leased as a movie house in the 1930s, because there was a risk of losing the theatre on account of taxes. This meant that the Association had limited use of the building, even though VLTA owned it. As Jessie Richardson described the situation in a 1949 brief to the Massey Commission:

By the contract [between the VLTA and the lessee] the VLTA is allowed the use of the theatre 18 days a year for 6 periods of 3 days each and the 2 Sundays prior to these periods for rehearsals, free, and all other days used are rented from the lessee. This extra time is composed of 2 extra days for each production (as all productions run for 5 days each) and any further Sundays needed for rehearsals or building of sets. For 8 years of the contract only 5 periods were used but during the last 2 years a children’s play has been produced between Christmas and New Year, in addition to the other 5 major productions, so that the full 18 days allowed by the contract are now used.

The Association then goes on to eloquently describe its plight to the Commission:

We feel that the VLTA fills the need for active participation and audience appreciation in theatre as well as any amateur organisation can, but it is restricted in its scope by the fact that although it has a theatre of its own, that theatre is poorly situated from the point of view of both audiences and members, being in the east end of a city which covers a large area and in which most of the participants live miles away from it and by the fact that being leased, only a limited period of time during a season can be spent in it. The lease still has five years to run before the theatre reverts back to the organisation for full time.
Even though the theatre would eventually revert back to the Association, the building itself was still poorly situated.

In the 1990s it seems remarkable, to those of us who know Vancouver, that a theatre situated on Commercial Drive would be too far away. Nevertheless, the area was difficult to access, and once there, it was rather hazardous. The roads were unpaved in places, the area muddy, and the street poorly lit. The theatre was built in an under-developed part of town, with open fields beside it. There were streetcars that went along Commercial, but they did not run all night for the convenience of people working late at the theatre.

The concern with wanting a suitable theatre space was perhaps the most important issue facing the theatre company. The members certainly felt that most other problems stemmed from this. The membership drive might help and more revenue might be generated if the theatre was closer to the downtown core. Moreover, a better location might draw greater support from the citizens of Vancouver, so that the responsibilities would not fall on the hard-working few.

In discussing its situation the Vancouver Little Theatre frequently compared itself to the London Little Theatre in Ontario. The London Little Theatre, perhaps the most successful little theatre of that time in Canada, was so popular it had a waiting list for members. This must have been vastly frustrating to the Vancouver-based Little Theatre. Jessie Richardson tried to find some valid reasons for the
disparity: "This may be because London is a wealthy residential city and not a large commercial city like Vancouver with a cosmopolitan and transient population....there is [also] a staff of paid employees in this organisation". Also, the London Little Theatre space was located in the Grand Theatre, right in downtown London. This reason of course helped fuel the Association's desire to have a more centrally located theatre.

The comparison between the two little theatres gave Vancouver Little Theatre a sense of inadequacy. It was difficult for the Little Theatre to accept that even Tacoma, Washington had a little theatre that boasted a membership of over 3,000, and that Vancouver, a city much larger, with the one of the oldest little theatres in Canada, was struggling to keep its 500 members.

In 1946, its twenty-fifth anniversary, the VLTA started a campaign to increase the membership to 5,000. At all times during this promotion, the company had the support of the media, who frequently championed its cause. As one article put it,

The theatre is enjoying a revival and the continent-size resurgence of interest in the stage emphasizes the many handicaps under which Vancouver's Little Theatre has struggled for so long. This is the twenty-fifth anniversary of our Little Theatre organisation, the oldest of its kind in Canada. The achievement of a 25th birthday reflects great credit on the group of enthusiasts who have kept the movement alive, but does no credit to Vancouver as a cultural centre...Conscious of Vancouver's theatrical backwardness, our Little Theatre leaders are promoting a drive to swell their membership to
5,000 and ensure sufficient financial support to guarantee a centrally-located community playhouse for the presentation of regular productions. The calibre of the actors and the quality of plays offered by the Little Theatre are now of such a high order that the organisation should be given every possible encouragement to expand. Anything less will offer a rude rebuff to a group of talented enthusiasts and their supporters and amount to a sad reflection on Vancouver's civic spirit and cultural outlook.71

Despite all efforts, the Little Theatre could not greatly improve on the size of its membership. By 1948 it reduced its goal to only 1500 members, a number easily achieved in the 1920s but unobtainable in the 1940s.

The VLTA tried to keep alive its dream of a new theatre building. One of the VLTA's recommendations to the Massey Commission was to "look into the need for community buildings for all cultural activities and particularly of a size suitable for theatre productions, and where necessary lend financial assistance in order that all Canadian cities and communities may have such buildings."72

During the summer of 1948, two members started to investigate the costs of building a new theatre. Alfred Evans, head of the Building Committee, and Yvonne Firkins, Production Manager for the 1948-49 season, talked with architects and builders and were told that it would cost $100,000 to build a theatre west of Granville on Broadway Avenue. Another option was to build a quonset hut, a type of pre-fabricated building, similar to the nissen huts which dotted the campus of the University of British Columbia during
the Second World War. Although the huts were cheaply made, they sometimes proved satisfactory as theatres. The original Frederic Wood Theatre at UBC was created in 1952 from two army huts put together in a T-shape. The Association preferred the idea of a purpose-built theatre, however, thinking it would be best situated as part of a community centre. The VLTA wanted then to rent the theatre space out to other organisations at a "nominal rental" when the company was not using it.73 Ideally, there would also be other rooms in which members could have meetings and rehearsals. As Jessie Richardson explained:

This may seem like a dream, but so must the idea of the theatre we now own have been when the organisation first began. It is not impossible, and there is plenty of money if we can persuade people to part with it for such a venture, and we are quietly planning toward this end.74

As it happened, the VLTA was stopped in its plans because of movements toward building a new civic theatre in downtown Vancouver.

During the summer of 1949, a civic project was proposed by City Planners: a new auditorium and public library. Also included in the complex would be an 800-seat performance venue, which the city planners referred to as a little theatre space. The VLTA, thinking that it would get very little support if it tried to raise funds for its own building with a possible civic theatre pending, decided to stop any future fund-raising campaigns and hoped that the plans for a civic theatre would not take long to get under way. Besides, if the
city built it, then the Little Theatre would not have to raise the money and pay for building the theatre itself!

(It was over four years before the proposal was ready to go before the voting public in a by-law, December 9, 1953. By the time it went through, the proposal was for a civic auditorium and a 750-seat theatre. In 1953, when the by-law passed, the Association was down to 350 members. No civic theatre space was actually available until 1959.)

After the war, changes happened on the artistic side of the theatre company as well as on the business side. By the 1949-50 season, the Board of Directors decided it was time to hire a full-time professional Producer-Director. They felt that it was no longer feasible to run a theatre on an entirely volunteer basis. People did not want to give as freely of their time as they had in the 1920s. The Association felt a solution to the problem lay in hiring someone whose sole interest was in the success of the theatre. The VLTA hired a young Englishman, Ian Dobbie, who had come to the Association's defense in an earlier public squabble.

The Association had put on a production of While the Sun Shines, directed by Phoebe Smith, as its opening show for the 1948-49 season. According to newspaper reports, the cast was rather young and inexperienced, and it was a difficult play, "even high class professionals had no easy task of putting [it] over in London." Constance MacKay, the theatre critic for the News-Herald, wrote a biting review, entitled "Little
Theatre Farce Effort Dies a-Borning".

The second act, which contains some of the most aimless dialogue ever written for the stage, seemed endless...The play was recently done here in a film version, with a cast of exceptional suavity and skill...thus handled it made a pleasant evening’s recreation. But such trivial fare must be presented with the most exquisite perfection to be endurable. In the hands of amateurs, no matter how good, these frothy productions die the death. Unfortunately the cast chosen this week is youthful and inexperienced. Nor are the actors even well chosen for type...It was an unfortunate evening all 'round.76

Ian Dobbie, responsible for the direction of the next production at the Little Theatre, defended While the Sun Shines. Dobbie was not a member of VLTA, nor was he personally involved with this particular production. In a letter to the editor of the News-Herald, he attacked professionally and at times personally - Constance MacKay.

That the second act, according to Mrs. MacKay, contained "...some of the most aimless dialogue ever written for the stage" can only be described as arrant nonsense. The English theatrical profession and the London theatre critics, of which Mrs. MacKay knows nothing, hold a majority opinion that this act is the funniest ever written for modern English comedy. And I find it extraordinary that Mrs. MacKay does not know the difference between farce and comedy. It is to be deplored that anyone should so advertise her complete lack of theatrical judgement.77

Dobbie, who had recently come from England, was a director, producer, actor, writer - all for the London stage and elsewhere. He had come to Vancouver during his travels, and while here had decided to get involved with the local theatre scene. One of his main quarrels with Constance MacKay was that he felt Vancouver's theatre needed constructive
criticism only. "Vancouver, as yet not theatre-conscious, sorely needs criticism on the few productions it is privileged to see. But the criticism must be constructive and competent, not an eruption of ill-versed cant."78

This reply to MacKay's review led to a war fought on the editorial page of the newspaper and in the VLTA box office. Constance MacKay wrote a reply to Ian Dobbie's letter the next day, defending her review, and saying that "Some of his letter is probably actionable, but it is hardly worth a busy woman's time to bother."79 The editor, feeling responsible for having published Dobbie's letter in the first place, in a footnote just below MacKay's reply, said: "We are sure that Mr. Dobbie in the heat of his clash on points of criticism did not intend to cast any personal aspersions on Constance MacKay and that no one would interpret his remarks in any such way, no matter how these two persons differ in their opinion on the subject at issue."80 Others joined the fray. Harry C. Lampkin, calling himself a "mere theatre-goer", in a letter to the editor sided with Dobbie, feeling that Dobbie's letter was written in "just indignation at an unfair and unnecessarily unkind criticism...Mrs. MacKay evidently believes that to be worth her salt as a 'critic', she must deliver a solid 'blast' now and then, let the axe fall where it may."81

Bernard Braden, a prominent Vancouver actor, felt that Constance Mackay was right in her attack of the play. In an eloquent letter he explained his position on the situation and
his opinion of Dobbie's attack:

Like Mr. Dobbie, I am a professional entertainer staying for a short time in Vancouver. Unlike him, I call Vancouver my home, and in the years before I left the city I found much to admire in many Little Theatre productions. It was for that reason that Constance MacKay's criticism of "While the Sun Shines" struck me as being more important than the performance of the play...[It] was bad theatre and bad entertainment. It was therefore important that someone let the Little Theatre know that it cannot get by on the grounds that it is a worthy enterprise. It must also deliver the good [sic]. Mrs. MacKay said just that, in no uncertain terms, and it is to be hoped that those responsible will profit from her frankness...With regard to Mr. Dobbie's personal reference to Mrs. MacKay it seems to me that a man who will thus refer to a lady is hardly the man to accuse her of writing an "ill bred bout of verbiage."82

The discussion was so widespread that it became the topic of a news column in a rival paper - a column syndicated across the country. Elmore Philpott of The Vancouver Sun observed that, as result of this review and surrounding controversy,

...everybody connected with the theatre got boiling mad. They really buckled down to prove to the public that the critics were wrong and that both the plays and players were not so bad. They did just that. By the end of the week they were turning out a really worthwhile performance. Unless I miss my guess that row was the luckiest thing that ever happened to our Little Theatre. I'll bet my hat the place will be packed out before the end of the season. For when you are a public person or a public institution you never need worry about being the centre of controversy. It's when nobody knows whether you are dead or alive that you have to worry.83

Perhaps one of the reasons the Association hired Ian Dobbie as director was because it felt, with him at the helm, the VLTA would be in the news a great deal. Within a few short months of being in Vancouver, Dobbie had become high
profile in the theatre community. Although the VLTA was known in Vancouver's theatrical circles, it did suffer from not having a high enough profile in the rest of Vancouver society. The Association certainly felt the threat of no one knowing whether it was dead or alive. With Dobbie at the helm, his well-known outspokenness had the potential to keep the Association in the limelight.

Dobbie was thirty years old when the VLTA hired him as its professional Producer/Director. He was the first full-time paid Artistic Director the theatre company had ever had. According to a published article about Dobbie, he already had fourteen years experience in British theatre, everything from stock companies to London's West End. During the War he had qualified himself to be an electrical engineer, but as soon as the powers that be realised he was an actor, he was sent off to entertain the troops in army shows. By the end of the War, he was building a theatre of his own, which he ran until he was forced out because of high taxes. In his "final word" on the argument between him and Constance MacKay, he states one of his reasons for coming to Canada.

Canada's greatest admirers state that Canadians are uncritical of themselves and others. Criticism is a symbol of shaking democracy's proudest possession - free speech. European encroachment upon this sacred right was one of the things which brought me to the North American continent.85

Originally, when he came to Canada, he wanted to work outside of the theatre. "I was a logger at Campbell River. Finished up as a rigging slinger too, by golly. Then I was a
fruit porter. You know, the guy who humps fruit onto a trolley for loading on trucks. My fellow porters come to see my shows these days."86 Within the first eighteen months of his being in Vancouver, he directed Deep Are the Roots at VLTA and The Glass Menagerie at New Westminster’s Vagabond Players. The programme of Deep Are the Roots reports that Dobbie was planning on moving to Hollywood. He did not. Instead, he was Director/Producer for the Little Theatre within a year.

Dobbie’s job at VLTA, as Jessie Richardson described it, was to:

...produce all plays and direct as many as it was found necessary for him to do. This in no way excludes members from directing plays but if another director is not available for any play it is his duty to see that it is done.87

In fact, he directed three of the five plays that first season. (There was also a sixth production, a Christmas play, not directed by Dobbie.) His greatest personal achievement in his first year was a production of Noel Coward’s Peace in our Time, a play Coward himself refused to produce because of its large cast and demand for props. The VLTA’s production therefore was a North American première. The situation was explained in an article in The Daily Province:

Ian Dobbie, who will direct the play, wrote to Mr. Coward and asked to be allowed to produce it. Mr. Coward not only gave the required permission, but himself instructed his agents, Doubleday and Co., to release it for performance in Vancouver. The play was never produced in New York because Mr. Coward refused to pay the exorbitant expenses involved in a play of this type if performed in that city. The fast action and the extraordinary number of hand properties necessitates the use of these properties.
at every rehearsal right from the start, which, in
turn, make it imperative to have a property crew on
hand at all times.88

Dobbie had a reputation for being an extremely hard
worker, and very demanding. He also had a reputation for a
terribly bad temper. "Casts of the plays he directs wince at
his cutting criticism, stuff their fingers in their ears when
he rants and raves. But they think he’s wonderful."89 Later
in his career, when he had moved on from the VLTA and was
working for Totem, his reputation and his temper went with
him. "In Totem’s Tony Draws a Horse, Bruce Busby (who is also
stage manager) plays the part of a man who every night walks
into a bar and takes a spite shot at a large painting of a
sailor. We wonder who suggested that director Ian Dobbie pose
as the sailor."90

During Dobbie’s term as director, the VLTA decided to
launch another extensive membership drive. At the beginning
of his tenure, the membership was just over 500, and the board
wanted to increase the numbers to 1500. By the end of
Dobbie’s time at the VLTA two years later, the number of
members had increased only to 694.

Artistically, however, Dobbie’s first year was considered
successful. The majority of the members liked the work he
did, but, according to Dobbie, the Board of Directors “bucked
him at every turn”.91 The Board felt he was a difficult
person with whom to work. There seems to have been a
difference of opinion as to who had the final say, and this
caused tension between Dobbie and the Board. Dobbie wanted more control in the productions, as The Vancouver Sun reported: "Ian would like to come back in the fall, but he would like 'more scope, more opportunity to broaden the organisation'. He feels 'it is useless to hire a man and then not give him any authority.'"92

The Board of Directors decided to hire Ian Dobbie for one more season, perhaps hoping that the tensions of his first year would not be repeated in the second year. Unfortunately, the tensions remained. Of the seven productions put on that season (one was a revival of an earlier production and one was a Christmas play), Dobbie directed all but two. In his report at the annual general meeting at the end of the year, the retiring President of the Association said that he thought the year had not been a success, financial or otherwise.

Len [Timbers, president of VLTA] made it perfectly clear that he 'was disappointed with the results' of this season. He felt that the great membership drive, which the professional director was to lead, could not be considered a success. Membership went up from 579 to 694 during the season. And in spite of the increase of new members, for the six productions put on this year there were 8817 seats sold, compared to 7812 seats for five shows last year, which according to Len is 100 persons less per play. The shortcomings of the season, Len thought, were due to several factors. The choice of plays was below par; there was a lack of good actors; there was more competition all over the city to draw the theatre crowd than there has ever been before, and the fourth factor was 'the difficulty of working with a professional producer.'93

Deciding to hire a professional producer was a risky undertaking. The producer would conceivably demand
professional standards from all participants in order to put on a high-calibre show - and Dobbie was exceedingly demanding. As well, there was possibly a negative effect on morale for the volunteers, who were working for free while Dobbie was being paid.

At least one Vancouver commentator on local theatre thought the decision to give up Ian Dobbie was unwise. Paddy Daly of the Vancouver Sun, in her regular column "Happenings in the World of Drama", twice cautioned the VLTA to reconsider its decision.

It would be wise if the board of directors of VLTA weighed very carefully the pros of keeping Ian Dobbie as Professional director, and fumed less on the cons. Have they ever had the mechanics of the theatre and the back stage crew in such competent hands?

And again:

It didn't take the drama clubs in town very long to learn that Ian had some time on his hands. Several groups have asked him to direct a play for them, but Ian says he turned them all down. We will lose about the best head there has been in Little Theatre circles when Ian leaves, and he is surely the hardest of workers. You only have to ask any who worked backstage with him. They'll tell you of the times he worked 48 hours without a stop.

After Ian Dobbie left the VLTA, he became involved with Totem Theatre, a new company in Vancouver and one of the first local professional theatre organisations in the city.

In the early 1950s, Vancouver became an active centre of professional theatre growth with new companies such as Everyman, Totem and Holiday Theatre. For the Vancouver Little Theatre this was an exciting and sobering time. Finally
Vancouver audiences were prepared to support professional theatre companies, and that was a source of satisfaction to the company. The VLTA felt justified in taking some of the credit for the growth of the professional theatres, as they had "drawn the majority of their players from the ranks of the Little Theatre." The VLTA felt, with pride, that "commercial theatre here [was] a direct outgrowth of amateur activity". As Margaret Rushton, then President of the Association, explained in 1953:

> Through good times and bad, continuously for thirty-three years, the VLTA members, imbued with the spirit of the founders and inspired by a love of theatre, have succeeded in keeping the flame of drama burning brightly, developing talent in many branches of theatre arts and in so doing undoubtedly preparing the way for the professional companies which were established two years ago. I believe that the Vancouver Little Theatre Association has fully justified its existence.

But the professional theatres also had a detrimental effect on the Association. The competition for audience members and competent actors was fierce. As the quality of the plays improved at VLTA, so did their expectations from actors; and when the good quality actors left to go to paying jobs, the VLTA was left with no audience and fewer able experienced actors.

This caused ripples in many directions. It prompted Yvonne Firkins, president of VLTA for the season beginning in the fall of 1951, to resign half-way through the season, on the grounds "that the local picture had changed; and that it had been taken over by Everyman and Totem Theatres."
Therefore, she felt she could do nothing for the organisation. It meant that some plays scheduled to be performed in the season had to be changed, as there were not enough actors to play the parts. It meant that the semi-professional gloss of VLTA's shows seemed tarnished in the light of true professional theatre. As Margaret Rushton put it,

We amateurs were delighted when professional theatre came to our city. We felt that Vancouver was growing up and at last there might be a chance for many talented actors to make a living in the west. We realised that we would have to raise our standards in order to compete and we accepted the challenge. After two years of hard work we have seen our audiences dwindle, our membership drop. We realise that some change of policy and organisation will be necessary if we are able to exist.

Even though professional theatre was a threat to the success of amateur theatre, the two types of organisations worked closely together, always giving each other support. Margaret Rushton concluded: "In spite of all these problems we have maintained the friendliest relations with the professional groups and we have done many things to help each other. I am constantly assured by the professionals that our (amateur) existence remains important to them." The VLTA certainly helped the professional theatre groups with essentially free publicity. Frequently the other groups would be mentioned in the Little Theatre programmes, and the VLTA felt it was important to tell their audiences that they should support theatre - of all kinds. One such plea for support appeared in the programme for Thieves' Carnival:

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"Keep Theatre Alive" - You have probably noticed this sentence on our bulletins, posters and programmes. It is quite self-explanatory, and yet we would like to say a word about it. You will have noticed that we did not emphasize the "Little Theatre" because we feel that all theatres in our city have to be kept alive - professional as well as the many small amateur groups existing - because we believe that theatre is an integral part of a growing city like ours, and only by patronage will it be able to assume and retain importance in the community and thus contribute to its development...We must KEEP THEATRE ALIVE and expand its scope so as to reach many, many more people, some who have never seen a play before...We want to give the many talented young people a better chance to learn the craft of the theatre, to develop, and if they so wish, attain a high professional status alongside other professional men and women, and so make their contribution to their community in their chosen profession.⁰²

One of the changes in policy considered was to amalgamate the amateur drama groups of Vancouver. There were 28 drama groups that had representation on the Community Arts Council in the early 1950s, and had they merged, would have likely been a behemoth. It would have been an incredible force with which to deal, if its size didn’t destroy it first. However, the VLTA never did anything more than consider the option of merging with other drama groups.

By the mid-1950s, the professional theatre companies had folded. It seemed that Vancouver was not quite ready for professional theatre after all. After the demise of professional theatre, the Association mourned the loss, prided itself that it had helped the cause immensely, but acknowledged - perhaps more to itself - that it, the VLTA, had survived.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Coming of Professional Theatre: 1960s and 70s

Vancouver’s new civic auditorium was complete and ready for use by the beginning of the fall of 1959. Once finished, it was named the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. The Vancouver Little Theatre Association put on its full 1959-60 season at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (also known as the QET).

The members of the VLTA believed that the final production of the previous season, 1958-59, would be the last of their mainstage productions ever to be performed at the York Theatre. The Association did not make plans to sell the theatre, however, nor did it rent the theatre out full-time to another organisation. The York Theatre was to be used instead as a rehearsal space, a scene shop, a performance space for the Workshop productions, as well as a revenue source for the Association through periodic rentals to other organisations.

The Association was excited if apprehensive about leaving its theatre of 36 years. Nevertheless, performing at a new theatre was a challenge it was ready to take on. There were obvious advantages and disadvantages to moving to the QET.
One of the greatest advantages was the location of the new theatre. Finally, the VLTA was performing downtown! This move boosted the organisation’s morale. Vancouver was finally ready to have the Little Theatre as part of the main theatre scene, in a downtown space. In an organisation that had believed it was largely ignored by the Vancouver theatre-going public, this was recognition long overdue. With so much high profile at the QET, the VLTA membership increased to well over 600. Before the move to the QET, membership had been hovering around 500.

The VLTA had long anticipated performing in the civic theatre complex. Although a little theatre space had been planned in conjunction with the auditorium, the latter was completed first. The VLTA was tired of waiting for the city to begin building the little theatre space, so decided to go ahead with plans to mount the 1959-60 season in the main auditorium.

The Association had a few hesitations about the move. The York Theatre had 450 seats, and even then the VLTA could not always fill the theatre for performances. The QET had 2800 seats. It was a true opera house, not an intimate little theatre space! The stage was huge as well. Gay Scrivener, an actress in the second production at the QET, remembers that "it was like running across a great barn!"

The Association presented a season of five plays - Visit to a Small Planet, Dial M for Murder, A View from the Bridge,
Tea and Sympathy and Tunnel of Love. The season was reasonably successful and attendance was good: almost 3600 patrons attended the season’s plays. According to the VLTA the attendance was good: with a little arithmetic the picture is not so rosy. On average there were five performances of each of the five productions that season. That works out to approximately 720 patrons per production, or fewer than 150 audience members a night. This is in a theatre that seats 2800 people.

Some of the disadvantages began to surface as the season continued. One of the most overwhelming difficulties the Association faced was that it was a non-union company performing in a union house. It was necessary for there to be at least one member of IATSE (the technicians’ union) at the theatre at any time the VLTA was there. The members of IATSE had to be paid by the VLTA, not by the civic theatre. Hiring technicians was a major expense for the Little Theatre Association. As the VLTA was an amateur theatre company, none of its participants was paid regularly except for token fees to the directors. As Guy and Marion Palmer explained in an interview:

GP: We didn’t realise [what] we’d be up against...once we got in there, [there was] the IATSE union crew...the thing that cooked it [for VLTA] was that when we said, "Where’s the curtain pull?"...they’d say "Its right here, just tell us what you want." You’d have to hire the guy for four hours to open the curtain, and he goes away and has his coffee until you finish with the show and then he pulls the curtain down again. Oh, of course in the interval if he’s there he’ll do it for free, as
long as you hire him for the minimum of four hours. There was also a union man staying there doing props and costumes — you could bring your own props and costumes — but you had to have the union crew standing by.

MP: In those days VLTA paid just one person and that was the director. They paid seventy five dollars to the director and that was the only money to change hands in terms of hiring...When they had to pay a stage manager, that cooked it for them. They had a hard enough time scraping together the director’s fees!

GP: We went in [to the civic theatre] with high hopes that we would be accommodated on rent and things like this, certainly until the civic theatre got going, because it takes a while. [The attitude at first was] "Please come on in!" but that disappeared pretty shortly.

The tremendous expense of the union house was something the theatre company had not experienced before. In one example cited, a union charge of $74.00 covered the setting of four chairs on the QET stage.

Nevertheless, the quality of the plays was good, and although the season was expensive, the Association wanted to continue at the QET. But near the end of the first season, the QET started to change the rental arrangement. Instead of a percentage of the house, the civic theatre demanded a daily rental fee. Originally, the Little Theatre would clear 25% of the box office returns. Now they had to contend with paying $400 rent per evening. The QET then informed the Little Theatre that the space would only be available for three nights per production. Meanwhile, there were difficulties with the IATSE union.

At first the union had agreed to let the members of the Little Theatre build their own sets and bring them into the
QET, but that policy changed. As stated in the VLTA minutes: "...in the beginning we were assured it would be alright to build our own sets, but it appears now that only sets bearing the Union Label are allowed into the QET." Then another agreement was reached where the Little Theatre Association was allowed to build its own sets, with some restrictions. Again, from VLTA minutes:

John Read gave a report on Actors' Equity - [it is] impossible to have equity players work in the QET unless they have a waiver. Stage hands have ruled that equity actors have to be paid...Gail McCance [of the QET] wanted assurance that none of the actors in the forthcoming play will be paid otherwise the scenery would have to be made in a union shop.

In negotiating with the City, the VLTA suggested the civic theatre pay for the union help out of the $400 rent. The theatre declined, but agreed to reduce the rental rates. The rate would remain at $400 if there was a good house, but if the house fell below 700 patrons, the rent would be $350, and if the audience fell below 650, the rent would be $300 a night. The VLTA asked for more than three nights per production, but the civic theatre "was quite definite about our being allowed three nights only for each production".

The VLTA had to reconsider its position with the civic theatre. "The board has to decide a) if it is possible for us to continue another year at the QE, b) shall we be forced to put on future productions at the York Theatre?" After all of these new developments, the Association opened the discussion to the members.
A general meeting was held May 1, 1960, with only forty people in attendance. (At this point there were approximately 650 members.) They were told it would cost the Association at least $6000 to go back to the QET:

The Majority’s argument seemed to be that if we could afford to gamble $6000 and risk going into the [QET] we could afford to gamble $6000 and renovate our own York Theatre. A lengthy discussion pursued [sic]. Pointers mentioned was [sic] the necessity of the York for workshop, rehearsals, etc. Some were of the opinion it would be suicide to return to the York and that our membership would drop considerably ...Mrs Rushton (past president)...considered staying at the QET a challenge and advised we should stick it out until the small theatre [is] built. Mrs. Rushton moved...that we stay on at the QET.109

A secret ballot was then taken. The results were: 21 in favour of going back to the York Theatre, 16 to remain at the QET.

The results were a surprise to some members of the Association. A number of people, possibly those involved in the Board of Directors, wanted the Association to return for another year to the QET. They decided that this vote could not be considered binding as there were only forty people involved. A letter, presumably written by the Board, was sent out to all members requesting that they come to the Annual General Meeting. The letter was slanted toward convincing them to choose the option of returning to the QET.

We do not feel that this vote was sufficiently large enough to be indicative of the wishes of the majority of the 650 members of the Association. This is a most important decision and one that could seriously influence the future course of amateur dramas in Vancouver...We urge you to attend this meeting and encourage you to cast your vote in
favour of remaining at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre for the ensuing year.\textsuperscript{110}

The letter went on to explain why it was important to stay at the QET:

Financial—during the past year VLTA undertook an ambitious program in the initial move to the QET. It has been successful and we believe that with a concentrated effort the next year at the QET could also be a success—even considering the increased rental fee. It is our opinion that a return to the York Theatre would create insoluble financial problems.

Productions—the productions in the past year at the QET have shown a high level of accomplishment and in our opinion this is primarily the result of the plays being staged in the theatre. This quality was not apparent in the previous year at the York Theatre.

Members—an informal poll of our members, and therefore our audience, indicates that a substantial loss in number would result from a return to the York Theatre. An effective membership drive following up past year's successes should result in a significantly larger membership if we stay in the QET.\textsuperscript{111}

The downtown theatre responded strongly to the news that the VLTA was not going to return. John Panrucker was the QET’s manager and VLTA’s contact at the civic theatre. In a letter to VLTA’s president Dorothy Goldrick, Panrucker wrote: "I cannot but feel, particularly after Tunnel of Love, that it would be a tragic mistake for you to desert the QE Theatre."\textsuperscript{112}

The Annual General Meeting was held on June 20, 1960. 150 people attended. The letter to the members must have worked, as the vote was reversed: 103 voted to remain at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, and 43 voted to return to the York Theatre. The motion was carried, and the Association chose to
return to the QET - for at least another year.

The 1960-61 year was the fortieth anniversary for the VLTA. The theatre company made plans to put on a full season of plays at the QET, even with the added expenses and time restrictions. In a review of the first play of the season, the Daily Province's drama critic was sympathetic to the situation that faced the VLTA.

Very soon after the Queen Elizabeth was opened to them, VLTA members discovered it was as much a curse as a blessing and they will not be really comfortable until the new small theatre is completed. Their presentation of "The Bride and the Bachelor" exemplified their discomfiture, for Yvonne Firkins had to fill this enormous stage with a set describing a single room. Sound, too, presented a problem which was not resolved, and then only partially, until the second act. And, besides, they have never felt completely welcome in this community theatre which likes best to cater for the big "name" shows. They'll do well even to pay their way out of the QE this season because of the change in their contract.13

Nevertheless, the QET still seemed to be a better choice to the VLTA than returning to the York Theatre. Unfortunately, the relations between VLTA and the QET soured early in 1961, over a conflict of scheduling dates.

VLTA had scheduled to put on "Crime and Punishment" at the QET January 5, 6 and 7. Then it was discovered that two of the dates had been rented to the Vancouver Symphony Society, here explained in the Vancouver Sun:

...as a result, the VLT agreed to accept split dates. It claims the [civic] board then agreed to absorb the extra costs involved of striking the sets and putting them up again. When the final contract was received from the board there was no mention of the absorption of the extra costs and the VLT was

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also told that it had to negotiate direct with the stagehands’ union (IATSE) for labour. As a result, the VLT was faced with big extra costs which it could not meet from a three night revenue.¹¹⁴

At this point, the amateur theatre company took on the civic auditorium commission by accusing them of defaulting on a contract, and then it cancelled its booking with the QET.

The Association looked for a new venue. It did not want to return to the York Theatre. The VLTA ended up at the International Cinema, the original CPR Vancouver Opera House. The International Cinema allowed the Association to perform in its non-union house for eight nights instead of the three offered at the QET.

The civic auditorium commission, displeased with this outcome, issued a statement outlining its position:

The VLTA has received the greatest consideration in respect of rentals and the use of facilities at QET in recognition of the fact that the productions of the association are better suited for presentation in the small theatre (adjacent to the QET) when it is completed. However there is a point beyond which the management of the QET cannot go in servicing or subsidizing the VLTA or similar groups since the provision of grants is the prerogative of the city and not the [civic theatre] commission. The arrangements for the exchange of dates involved certain concessions to the VLTA which the commission believed were acceptable. The late cancellation by VLTA of what had been considered by the theatre management as a firm booking has caused a loss to the theatre which has had to decline other more remunerative bookings for the dates which are now vacated.¹¹⁵

The civic commission did not consider any legal action against the VLTA, as there had not been a signed formal contract. VLTA, on the other hand, wanted to follow up with a
VLTA made a petition to the city to consider its position in the conflict. After a couple of months of consideration and investigation, the city "denie[d] any liability". VLTA still wanted to stand its ground, and argued that should receive some sort of compensation. "The question that could show double booking to have put us out financially is focal; we probably could not make a case out of Panrucker dealings with us; but we should claim for losses on tickets -- as a non-profit organisation."

VLTA also wanted to petition the civic commission to make the new Playhouse a non-union house, for the benefit of organisations such as VLTA itself.

After discussion it was decided that a letter be written to the board of Administration, City Council to get permission by stating purpose, to go before City Council to propose that the new smaller civic theatre be a non-union house. It was hoped that two other organisations could be represented in this plea (people already using the QE) as well as other representatives observing this hearing.

Nothing came of this. The new Playhouse theatre, which opened in 1962, was also a union house, and there is no more documentation about the Little Theatre petitioning the city for compensation. The rest of the Little Theatre's 1960-61 season was played at the International Cinema. Total attendance was only half that of the previous season, with 1700 patrons.

The next season the company returned to the York Theatre, as there seemed no other option. Returning was frustrating. As the York aged, it needed more and more upkeep, which took
money that the theatre company did not have. A committee was made to consider the situation of the company’s finances:

[The problems are] that of raising money to restore the York Theatre to a reasonable condition of operating efficiency. Its present ailments are a nuisance and a continual drain on the general funds of the VLTA. Its appearance also is not one to attract people who once go there, to re-attend. It has a run-down neglected look, which, if overcome, would to some degree offset its unsuitable location ...[the other problem is] that of raising money for the VLTA’s general funds so that it can continue to finance its productions at a proper standard. 119

A year and a half before, when VLTA was in its first year at the QET, the Fire Marshall inspected the York Theatre. As the VLTA minutes reported, "The Building Inspector commented on cleanliness and appearance but felt that he would be doing VLTA a favour if he condemned the building." 120 To fix the theatre completely would have cost a great deal, but VLTA did not want to be in the York Theatre anyway. Its solution was to continually patch the building together, in order for it to be just barely satisfactory.

Even the theatre’s usefulness as a revenue-generating source had diminished. Because of the rundown condition of the theatre, it was difficult to rent the space to other groups when VLTA was not using it. The debts continued to grow. The Little Theatre decided to apply for a tax relief for property taxes owed in 1962. The City turned the VLTA down. As the Daily Province reported,

Aldermen said Tuesday they saw little sense in subsidizing the LTA’s playhouse on Commercial Drive. Not when the City’s own QE Playhouse is standing empty on most nights. So City Council held up a
request from the Little Theatre for a grant equal to its unpaid 1961 taxes. Council asked its auditorium board to review the whole subject of amateur theatres with the association. The idea is to encourage the Little Theatre to use the city's Playhouse and perhaps to sell its money-losing York Theatre.\textsuperscript{121}

It seemed the solution was to spend money the Association did not have. The VLTA began to negotiate with the civic theatre to use the new Playhouse space for the 1962-63 season, as suggested by the City Council. At one point, the Little Theatre had wanted to be the first group to perform in the new space, "in view of our 40 years of operation and more than 200 plays produced"\textsuperscript{122}, but no request seems to have been made to the City. Nonetheless, the VLTA was still the first amateur theatre group to perform at the Vancouver Playhouse. The Daily Province reported: "Many groups have said that the Playhouse is beyond their budget, so it is very encouraging to see the VLTA ignoring the pessimism and giving the place a whirl."\textsuperscript{123} The Playhouse was beyond the VLTA's budget as well - the expenses for a five day run were high, as the VLTA minutes reveal:

\textbf{Estimate re using Playhouse:} Rehearsal - $75, 5 nights' rent - $750, Union wages - $400, sets - $200, Transportation - $50, royalties - $200, publicity - $300, props - $100, programs and posters - $75, Director - $150, tickets - $100, Miscellaneous - $100, totalling $2500. If we could sell 1280 seats at $2.00, we could cover costs.\textsuperscript{124}

The Association was hoping to sell 1280 seats for one production: only a year earlier the VLTA had succeeded in selling only 1700 seats for an entire season.
Meanwhile, a new amateur theatre movement was growing in Vancouver. The Metropolitan Co-operative Theatre Society, a loose confederation of smaller amateur groups, was starting to collect members. Some members of the society were the Richmond Community Theatre, Emerald Players, Vancouver Theatre Guild, Vagabond Players, Greater Vancouver Opera Society, Burnaby Players, and North Shore Light Opera Society. VLTA decided to join as an 'outside' member. This gave the Little Theatre the option to put on plays other than at the Metro Theatre space. ('Inside' members were expected to put on all of their productions at the Metro Theatre.) This opened another option, should the Playhouse not fit into VLTA's plans.

VLTA's first production at the Playhouse, *Write Me a Murder*, was well received. The *Daily Province* reported it was "a very satisfying production for which credit must also go to the comfort of the Playhouse which is conducive to enjoyment, and a contrast to the group's spartan and rather sleazy headquarters, the York."  

The VLTA was now performing in a more suitable theatre than the QET auditorium. It was producing plays downtown, and the plays were looked upon as semi-professionally produced: at least the plays were being performed at a professional house. VLTA was not being handicapped by a decrepit theatre, nor too large a theatre. This meant that VLTA's performances were being judged on the same level as the other professional
productions in the city. Before this, VLTA was forgiven much because of its handicaps. Now it was competing on a par with the professionals. This meant as well that it was open to the criticism the other professional theatre companies had. Oh Men! Oh Women!, its second production at the Playhouse Theatre space, was evidently panned by a critic, and the audiences stayed away. VLTA could not completely overlook the bad press. The company sent out a thinly-disguised grievance letter to its members.

Shall we delve into the reasons why this well-produced play did a box-office belly-flop? Shall we bemoan the fact that an overwhelming part of Vancouver's theatre-going public is so fickle that it accepts a newspaper critic's personal scale of preferences for plays as its own? Shall we suggest that while the VLTA after 42 seasons is still striving to overcome the severe limitations of available time and money inherent in an amateur organisation in order to play a responsible role in the cultural environment of Vancouver, the local newspapers have long since abandoned their responsibility of developing a public truly informed about local affairs in this area? Away with such useless recriminations - the play's the thing! So one [sic] with the show...and may it be a whopping success!

Unable to accept the criticism with grace and carry on, the VLTA felt the need to complain. The reviews suggested that the VLTA was not up to the professional standards developed by others in the city. Perhaps the Association, too accustomed to its handicaps, assumed all criticism would continue to be considerate.

For two or three more years, VLTA struggled to compete with the downtown theatrical scene. It performed in a variety.
of venues - the Playhouse, the Metro, International Cinema - it even returned to the QET for a benefit performance for the SPCA. By 1964, the organisation realised it could not compete with the other companies. The VLTA minutes stated: "We are not competing with the Playhouse or Metro, but have a unique position in having a working theatre and training ground."\(^\text{127}\) By 1965, the company chose to move back, permanently, to the York Theatre. Apparently the old familiar York, for its faults, was more comfortable than the new theatre scene in Vancouver. This explanation was given to the members: "Of necessity, the programming has changed with the years. When the QE complex was built, with great courage we moved our major productions downtown, first to the QE and then to the Playhouse. Now with professional theatre in Vancouver and strong amateur groups in the Greater Vancouver districts, we have returned to our beloved York."\(^\text{128}\) Ironically the York Theatre, once considered an albatross around VLTA's neck, was now called beloved.

The Vancouver Little Theatre Association had, as the years passed, become too spread out. It had been putting on mainstage plays in numerous different locations, as well as workshop productions, sometimes at the York, sometimes through the Extension Department at UBC. It rented out the York Theatre. It felt it needed a green room space, and rented a room above the grocers next door (for which it had to pay extra rent). It was involved with festivals - not only the
DDF, but others such as the one-act play festivals and the BCDA. It did benefit shows. It was involved with the Metro Theatre. It owed money to numerous groups. The general upkeep of the York Theatre took up a vast amount of time and energy - most minutes from board meetings for the VLTA are more suggestive of a board for the running of a building than for the running of a theatre company. The VLTA’s archives contain, from this period, a 25 page list of different executive positions and the job descriptions for each. The positions described were:

President, recording secretary, corresponding secretary, vice president (producer), treasurer, chairman of stage department, chairman of business department, chairman of publicity and public relations department, chairman of play selection and casting department. STAGE DEPARTMENT: stage manager, chairman of properties, costume manager, lighting manager, scenic manager, sound manager, makeup manager. BUSINESS: box office manager, ushers manager, maintenance manager, programmes manager, house manager. PUBLICITY: Publicity manager, reception manager, social manager, CASTING AND PLAY SELECTION: play selection manager, casting manager, play reading manager.

It was a constant struggle to motivate people to carry out all these responsibilities. Frequently the same faithful few would complete the necessary work. Often some of these faithful would resign, frustrated with the way the Little Theatre was being run. Helen Bristowe, a member of the Board of Directors in the early 1960s, resigned her position for this reason;

It is my considered opinion, after working with the Board the past year and a half that they are not now working efficiently as an entity and do not have any
positive programme of policy which is enforced. Both these situations will have to be rectified if we feel if VLTA is to go ahead, which it must inevitably do, or go backwards, and I feel we should be leading theatre groups in this area, not lagging behind.\textsuperscript{130}

Meanwhile, despite the problems, the Association wanted to run like a professional company – expecting the kind of commitment from the members that a professional theatre would receive from paid employees. In his report to the Annual General Meeting in 1962, Eddie Calvert, Director of Productions, laid out his expectations for an ideal theatre company. His demands are much too idealistic, especially for amateurs devoting their time and energy for free:

I believe an organisation of our size and potential requires either a salaried full-time producer-manager, or else several dedicated people who will devote all of their spare time to the organisation, so that it will operate in an efficient and professional-like manner. I also believe that the only way the VLTA – or any organisation of this nature – can survive and exist with any degree of success, is to have people with a burning enthusiasm for theatre. People with professional attitudes – like punctuality, co-operation, tolerance, and a passion for knowledge and experience leading to perfection in the artistic and technical fields. Where this passion is missing, the results will always be mediocre and amateurish.\textsuperscript{131}

Everything pointed to the fact that the company was losing its edge.

The situation improved for a short time, when the Association again hired an Artistic Director. In 1965, John Parker directed The Father, and then was hired to be the Artistic Director for the company. The Association liked his dedication to the cause. The quality of the plays improved
under his administration, and the financial situation even improved slightly for at least one of his years as Director. The financial improvement was short-lived, however, and the company continued to run on donations. Membership also dwindled. The spirit of the Association was seeping away.

In 1968, a party expressed interest in buying the York Theatre. The organisation was vaulted into action. Should it sell the theatre? Was that the solution to the difficulties VLTA faced? Could it make do in another space? Could it even find another space? In the end, however, the buyers moved on to something else. Nevertheless, the possibility reawakened in the members a desire to take some positive action, and to stop the theatre company’s aimless drifting.

Early in 1969, the Association sent out a notice to the members asking them to come to a meeting in which the future of the Vancouver Little Theatre would be decided. Some of the alternatives were a) to federate with the Metro Theatre, b) to sell and move to a central site, c) to stay, redesign and renovate, or d) to stay, replace the roof and carry on at the York. A meeting was held on April 22, 1969, with 50 people in attendance (the membership stood at around 300 at this point). They voted unanimously to renovate and redesign the York Theatre. This was not the easiest option open to the VLTA, but the members wanted to stay on. As The Vancouver Sun reported,

VLTA thought it needed a new home. But when the membership got right down to a decision, the old
York theatre at 637 Commercial couldn’t be abandoned, in spite of her leaky roof, crowded dressing rooms, menageries of mice and location back in the glamourless east side of town... A majority of those members were in the younger age bracket, [President John] Neville added, pointing out that the nostalgia was more a love of the theatre than a wish to hang on to 'the good old days' by any group of older members...' No one, it seems, can bear to part with the cumbersome old lady who has mothered so many on the way up,' reported the VLTA news sheet.  

The members enthusiastically wanted to do major changes to the building, but started by doing inexpensive renovations. As the VLTA newsletter reported: "[The building committee have] been seeing bank managers, construction experts, engineers, and, finally, stars!" The first thing to be finished was a new roof, completed in the summer of 1969. A new scene shop was then built beside the building, the lobby was extended into the old scene shop, the front of the building was given a "facade-lift." This first phase cost $12,000. Before the first phase was even complete, the Association had run out of money to cover the renovation. In The Yorker the organisation made a plea for more money. "At this vital stage, we are making progress, however MORE money is needed...If each of our 300 members donated $20.00, the total of $6000 would immediately solve our financial problems." Any other phases planned were put on indefinite hold, as the cost of the first phase had become so high.

At the end of that season, 1969-70, Artistic Director John Parker resigned. "My decision is for purely personal
reasons," he wrote. "It would be easy for me to serve as A[rtistic] D[irector] for the rest of my life. It was personally most rewarding..." With his leaving, the Association lost a most dedicated Artistic Director, who was interested in the welfare of the theatre company, whether it was being successful or not. The next few years saw a succession of Artistic Directors, none of whom had the dedication of Parker, and none stayed longer than a year. The Artistic Director for 1970-71 was Jace van der Veen, for 1971-72 Michael Berry, and for 1972-73 Michael Ball and his wife, Sharon Pollock. The constant turnover in Artistic Directors reflected the spiralling downward movement of the Association. Near the end of the 1972-73 season, there was another offer to buy the York. A special meeting was held to vote on whether to sell or not. As The Yorker reported,

Walter Shynaryk chaired a special meeting of twenty members, a bare quorum, who decided the direction in which VLTA would move, or stand still, or retrogress for the next season or two. The offer to buy the York by the Patel brothers was voted down almost unanimously. Eleven of those present offered to work in some capacity to keep VLTA afloat. Good Luck to them! The way the local initiative grants are cutting across established patterns of local drama, they will need it in great gobs.137

Vancouver’s theatre scene was shifting away from community theatre. New professional theatre companies were springing up everywhere, most of them small and experimental. Such companies such as Tamahnous and the Arts Club, as well as the regional theatre company, the Playhouse, were finding success in Vancouver, and this was taking its toll on the
VLTA. Many of the professional theatre companies begun at this time are still producing plays in Vancouver, most of them financed in part by government grants. Many of the early grants were initiated from the Local Initiatives Programme mentioned above. VLTA had become the 'old-fashioned' style of theatre in Vancouver. Theatre-goers were now more interested in the new theatre movements.

The editors of VLTA's The Yorker, in their last newsletter of May 1973, expressed the frustrations permeating the Association.

"In Desperation"; We have been trying all this season to overcome the feeling that we are wasting our time putting out a Yorker. There just don't seem to be sufficient members and former members who are interested in VLTA's diminished activities... When last did the few VLTA members still actively feel a sense of excitement when planning activities for the next season? For many reasons, including factors beyond their control, a sense of duty and a feeling of pressure has replaced the spontaneity, the sharing of experience and the small and large triumphs. Then, of course, the fewer they get the grimmer the going becomes compared to what it used to be.138

An open and lengthy discussion ensued at the Annual General Meeting that year, after an unsuccessful season. The members wanted to determine what to do with the future of the theatre company, and their York Theatre:

The rest of the meeting was devoted to a general, wide ranging, rather inconclusive discussion of past and present problems - at the end of a dismally unsuccessful year. It is felt that appointment of an Artistic Director unfamiliar with the group is not appropriate at the present time. The general feeling of those present certainly was that VLTA should continue its activities but that efforts must be made to ensure good quality productions...There
were many comments, complaints and suggestions during the discussion and no attempt was made to record them, the purpose of the meeting being to have an open discussion to which everyone contributed - everyone did!\textsuperscript{139}

It was decided at the meeting that the Association should try to continue, but that it was a good idea to decrease the numbers of productions per season. Within four years, the company was down to two productions per season, due to lack of funds and audiences. The problem was addressed at an Extraordinary General Meeting in March 1977:

 VLTA presented only 2 productions - full scale productions are too expensive to mount, our audiences have been poor, and the theatre has been heavily rented. We are giving workshops for children and adults to provide training in theatre technique that is not available elsewhere and an opportunity to perform. Next year, if there is no improvement in the money situation and there is heavy rental demand, VLTA may stage only one major production and concentrate on "recreational" members-only productions with short rehearsals and runs.\textsuperscript{140}

The positive side to the increased rental of the theatre was that it opened the possibility of generating enough revenue to renovate the theatre. In 1975-76, consideration was given to more renovation - a completion of Phase Two planned six years earlier. Renovation costs in 1975-76 were estimated at $100,000. The estimates quickly escalated to $360,000. Some money was raised, and there were small renovations completed, as the Association continued to apply for more funding.

By 1977, all possible sources of funds turned down VLTA. No other options were available. Then at the beginning of the 1977-78 season, the Building Inspector delivered the final
death blow to the York Theatre. "Building inspectors advise that unless a new fire escape and sprinkler are installed immediately the theatre will be closed down."141 Until these safety renovations were completed, VLTA could not use the theatre, either for its own productions, or as a rental space. If it did, it would be liable in case of an accident.

Again, the question of what to do with the York was brought up for discussion at an Extraordinary General Meeting, held November 7, 1977. This time, the members made the final decision: sell the York Theatre.

As soon as the decision was made, the organisation looked for a buyer. By March of 1978, the York Theatre was sold. Always optimistic, the VLTA felt that the move would bring life back to the Association, whose membership had drastically dwindled to a meagre 65 people. "While it will be readily understood that the inevitability of the sale was faced by VLTA's Board with considerable reluctance, it was also realised that the move gives an opportunity for a new lease in life to Canada's oldest surviving amateur theatre association."142
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: VLTA After the York Theatre

After VLTA sold the York Theatre in the spring of 1978, the money from the sale of the building was put into long-term deposits, most of which would not come to term for five years. Otherwise, the most important item on the agenda was to find a new home. Fifty-five years of memorabilia in the form of set pieces, costumes, props and equipment needed a new storage space. The first temporary location VLTA moved to was 1880 1/2 Ontario Street. The 'new space', as it was dubbed, was over a lumber yard, and lasted one season, 1978-79. VLTA was able to put on two productions that season, both played at the Metro Theatre. It was also able to put a play into the B.C. Festival. By the end of the season, it had found another space, at 748 Richards Street. Within the first year there was a revolt among the members against the board of directors: it was felt that the board was not leading the Association in the direction the members wanted. This led to a new board, and a new President, Mary Ann MacNeill, and new plans.

Mary Ann MacNeill, with her husband Robin, were
interested in seeing VLTA try a new tactic. As members of the board, and sometimes as presidents, the MacNeills had enough power to change the direction of the company within the next four years. They were able to convince the board to put VLTA on hold, and to create a professional company instead. As Colin Funk, later VLTA president, explained: "VLTA would be the administering body, but there would be [a professional] repertory company underneath VLTA called the Vancouver Repertory Theatre...basically VLTA was just forgotten about completely except on paper."143 It was supposed to be a full-fledged professional theatre, complete with salaries and contracts. Funk was involved at the time as an actor. But the actors were not getting paid. The feeling among the actors towards the board and the people making decisions was very discordant. VLTA was also beginning to create a bad reputation for itself.

The problem finally came to a head in the summer of 1982. The Vancouver Repertory Company was supposed to put on a performance at Robson Square, when, in an ugly scene, some of the actors revolted and refused to go on stage. Funk remembers, "I believe Robin had to go out and make an announcement to the audience that the cast wasn’t going to go ahead and do the show...there [were] a few of us that were really upset about what was happening." This was the only way that the actors felt they could have their voices heard against the injustices they felt they were receiving from the
board. The actors had signed contracts, but the board was not fulfilling its part of the contract.

Many of the actors involved at the time felt that trying to make VLTA into a professional company went against the original objective of the Association, that it should remain a community theatre. At this point, Colin Funk decided to take matters into his own hands.

I was personally so angry at what had happened that we were...determined to...set it straight, somehow, find out what the hell was going on, or at least get a new group working in there. So...I actually snuck into the studio, and stole their constitution, because none of us had any access to [it]...we had to climb over the wall.

Colin Funk was interested in trying to get back to the Association’s mandates, but knew that it would be impossible to try to make the theatre group exactly the way it was. He recognised that change was needed, but he still felt that it was important to keep the spirit of community theatre alive. By taking the constitution, he was able to find out what options were open to the members who felt the same.

I realised that all we needed was ten people who were members to sign a piece of paper so that I could call an [extraordinary] annual general meeting. And so for the next month I...looked up all these people, drove all around town and got signatures, and I mailed a letter to Robin and Mary Anne [MacNeill] saying, we members of VLTA are calling an Annual General Meeting.

Nineteen people showed up. When they got to the meeting, they discovered a letter under the door. It was a letter of resignation from Robin and Mary Ann MacNeill. At this point, Colin was elected President, because most people felt that
because he had gone to so much trouble, he truly had the Association's best interests at heart, and would work to reunite the company.

At this meeting, it was discovered that VLTA was $30,000 in debt, from the failure of the professional venture. As the money from the sale of the York was in long-term deposits, it was not available to pay off the debt. "That pretty well scared everybody away except about four of us who determined we would try to deal with this." They discovered they could defer payments on the debt by using the interest payments from the term deposits to pay it off. (When the money in the long-term deposits became available, they were able to pay off the remaining debt, as well as put some money towards other theatrical ventures. The VLTA donated $10,000 to the Shakespeare Festival: unfortunately the Festival folded the next year. They also started trust funds within the VLTA; money towards helping develop new scripts, or new theatre companies. According to Colin, by the time they left in 1985, a majority of the capital had been committed in one way or another.)

This started a year of redefining the direction of VLTA, as well as finding a suitable performance space. The workroom on Richards Street functioned mainly as a storage area, but not as a place to perform. "Our goal was to find a space. Unless we had a home we would be just like the [Vancouver] Repertory Theatre. The Rep[ertory] Theatre never had a home,
so there was no identification."

The solution came in 1983 in the form of Heritage Hall on Main Street at 15th Avenue. Heritage Hall was run by a co-operative volunteer group, called The Main Source. The Main Source's constitution for using the building made it necessary for there to be a cultural body using part of the building. The cultural body originally involved with The Main Source was AVA, or Avenue for the Arts. The VLTA became involved with AVA, and AVA and VLTA were given the use of the basement.

Within the year, VLTA was having problems with AVA. AVA wanted to use the area for storage only, but Colin Funk and Connie Brill, Colin's future wife, saw it as a potential performance space. When AVA stopped paying the rent, VLTA broke off ties with it. The Association was able to join The Main Source on its own, because of the VLTA's non-profit status.

The basement needed much work. It had been used as a storage and construction area, and it was unfinished. There was garbage everywhere, as well as a large puddle in the middle of it. Colin Funk and Connie Brill moved into the space and started to clean it up. They also started to think about what they could use it for, and what function VLTA should perform in the theatre scene in Vancouver. As the space was too small to support royalty-paying productions, they decided to stage new locally written works.

Many people had been disenchanted with the way VLTA had
been going for the first few years after the sale of the York Theatre, and at first were sceptical about the new VLTA. Connie Brill discovered this when she tried to interview Dr. Dorothy Somerset, one of the original members of the VLTA.

The first half hour was spent with Dr. Somerset interviewing us. She explained that VLTA had acquired a bad name ever since the late 1970s. She wanted to know what right we had to use the name, how we would be different from other companies, if we planned on turning professional, and would we be VLTA if it wasn’t for the money. She had numerous questions on how Colin Funk came to have control of VLTA funds. Connie answered her questions and assured her that our intentions were to restore theatre to its amateur status and that it was our task to earn the right to use the name, and clear any negative feelings the community or old-timers have toward the Little Theatre...Dr. Somerset concluded that she had not been interested in the theatre any more but having talked with us, she now was. She said if anyone asked her about the 'new' VLTA she would say we were a group of young people who ought to be given the chance and support to prove ourselves. She said the proof was in the eating and that if the old-timers came out to support us then we had earned the honor of using the name.144

The VLTA succeeded in producing new plays for two seasons. Then in 1985, Connie and Colin realised that having a family was also important to them, and they wanted to hand VLTA over to someone else. Their biggest fear was that someone would want to take it over simply to acquire the money from the sale of the York, or to take over the space to use it as a free rehearsal area. They wanted to see the space shared by several interested parties, not for it to be dominated by one group. At this point, they decided to make the Association into the Vancouver Little Theatre Alliance.
The VLT Alliance would function as an umbrella organisation, making available an affordable space for other community theatre groups, thus carrying on the tradition of the old VLTA. It meant that the Association would cease to be a producing company: now it would be an organisation to run a theatre space. Colin Funk explains:

In a way it's unfortunate that it's not the Vancouver Little Theatre Association 'Company' that's running that [place]. It [VLTA] has indirectly died out, but the problem is it had such baggage in terms of what it was...and it's unrealistic to think they would ever reach that profile again, because it is a community [theatre]. I mean, people volunteered for everything back then.

The impetus for the VLTA came from the art theatres of Europe. Not content with the entertainment available at the time, some forward-thinking individuals created the Vancouver Little Theatre. They tried to capture the imaginative creativeness alive in the art theatres elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately, the focus quickly shifted from this ideal to a theatre company whose financial situation dictated its direction. Many of the early choices for plays reflected the interests of those members dedicated to the art theatre, but later plays chosen were geared for the audience's entertainment. Innovation, once a driving force for the
founders, was relegated to the studio-type performances, in order to avoid risking financial collapse. A company born out of the ideals of the art theatre was transformed into an organisation that catered to the pleasure of the general public.

By the 1930s, the Depression was affecting all facets of life, and film was starting to have an impact on the entertainment world. Then the Second World War brought some meaning back to the importance of VLTA, as the company saw itself as important to the well-being of those still at home. As professional theatre began to be explored in the early 1950s, VLTA suddenly had stiff competition, which had a two-sided effect: VLTA had to compete for audiences, but also its standards rose in order to keep up with companies like Totem and Everyman.

The presence of a civic theatre building in Vancouver in the late 1950s and early 1960s was initially an exciting prospect for VLTA. But when the theatre was there, and the company had to contend financially on a professional level, it was a trying and sobering experience. Finally VLTA recognised that it could not compete on a professional level. For another fifteen years it laboured to find its niche in Vancouver's theatre, and continued barely to hang on. Then the VLTA sold the York Theatre, and severed old ties. The Association sank further into debt, and lost what was left of its reputation before it found a new objective. The York
Theatre is still standing, and it is mostly used as a rehearsal hall for rock bands. The exterior has been painted with a large and colourful mural. According to the manager, it may be pulled down in the very near future.

Theatre has changed a great deal in Vancouver since the inception of the VLTA. Most of the present emphasis in the city is on professional theatre, but there are some amateur theatre groups as well. It is not possible to say that the theatre groups thrive because being in theatre in this society means a constant struggle for survival. All of the professional companies are subsidized by government, in some form or another. Theatre must compete with other forms of electronic entertainment such as movies and television, which are more popular than theatre to the general public.

VLTA’s struggle for success was not unique to the Association. Its story is similar to that of many little theatres who have had to contend with mass entertainment and changing societal values. And, like many other organisations, VLTA found it hard to accept things it could not change. Perhaps the people who were involved in VLTA were too close to the subject to be objective enough about it. Perhaps, as well, they did not want to let go of what was familiar, and change with the times. As Connie Brill put it;

You have to adapt to a new world, instead of saying, "Why can’t we recapture the old glory?" The world has changed, [and we need to ask] "What do we do to fit in? Where is our niche?" Once you find your niche, you will have your own glory once again. It won’t be the same ever, because theatre in society
is a lot different than it was back then. I mean that was [the] entertainment, going out to the theatre. And as other forms [of entertainment] come in, then it becomes a very different story altogether, so you have to learn how to adapt and find out what is needed in the community that we can fill with the tools we have.

Looking back on the original objectives of the VLTA, it is possible to see which ones were achieved, and which were sacrificed. The first is "to promote the study of drama." It is possible to say that its tenacity alone achieved this mandate. In its seventy-plus year history, the VLTA put on hundreds of mainstage productions. It continued to perform "private performances" or studio productions on and off throughout its history. It periodically conducted classes for acting, direction, and production. It promoted new playwrights, either through production of their plays or in workshops. It provided a venue for other companies, both at the York Theatre and at Heritage Hall. It promoted other theatre groups, and supported local theatre of all types. In this mandate the VLTA succeeded.

The second is "to produce high class plays by British and foreign dramatists, not ordinarily given by travelling companies". This mandate relates mostly to the early years of the VLTA's existence. The VLTA did put on plays the travelling companies did not; many of the plays were ones being done by little theatres elsewhere. As the decades passed, the VLTA still favoured the foreign plays to the works done by Canadians. This ties into the third objective, "to
encourage and provide facilities for the production of plays by Canadian dramatists”. This objective, although not on the forefront of the Association’s activities, did promote local works. The last, "to develop the arts of costume and scenic design and stage lighting," must have been restricted all along by financial considerations, and was, perhaps, the personal desire of the two founders, Sam Wellwood and Charles Ferguson.

Other unwritten mandates existed. The VLTA, once established, lost some of its importance during the Depression. For the rest of its existence, the Association tried to get back the old glory, but never completely succeeded. As well, its original impetus, to be a little theatre in the same tradition as the art theatres of Europe, dissipated when financial considerations began to override artistic decisions.

Unlike some other little theatres in Canada, VLTA never turned professional. On the other hand, many theatre people who began at VLTA did become professional. VLTA was a source for talented young performers such as John Drainie, John Gray, Joy Coghill, Rosemary Malkin and Sam Payne; and for directors such as Jessie Richardson, Phoebe Smith, Yvonne Firkins and Ian Thorne. Many people who have been influential in the theatre scene began at the Vancouver Little Theatre Association. The wealth of talent that went on to create theatre elsewhere made the Vancouver Little Theatre
Association's existence an important factor in the growth of theatre, not only in Vancouver, but in Canada.
NOTES

CHAPTER ONE


6. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

CHAPTER TWO

7. City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), Sheila Neville Collection, Add.MSS 807, File 4, manuscript written by Sheila Neville for Chuck Davis' *The Vancouver Book*, 1975. This quotation, n.d. [1971-74?], was not used in the book.


15. Ibid., p. 3.


18. Ibid.

19. Ferguson, loc. cit., p. 3.


25. Ferguson, loc. cit., p. 4.


27. Leyland, loc. cit.

28. "Little Theatre is Scene of Three Clever Sketches", *The Vancouver Sun*, December 16, 1921, p. 16.


30. Leyland, loc. cit.


32. Leyland, loc. cit.


34. Leyland, loc. cit.

36. CVA, Add.MSS 41, Vol. 5, File 4, E.V. Young, letter to Mr. Reid, August 11, 1935. "Facilis est" is a Latin proverb, meaning "It is easily done". Young is probably using it ironically.


38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.


41. CVA, Add.MSS 41, Vol. 5, File 4, R. Beveridge of the Westmount Dramatic Club, letter to H.H. Simmonds, no date [1933-34?]. "We wish you every success with your history of Vancouver’s famous Little Theatre." At the time, VLTA was trying to accumulate information on other little theatres in Canada, as it was writing a history of its own company. The history was cursory; not the major work VLTA planned.

CHAPTER THREE

42. Cheney, pp. 96-97.


44. CVA, Add.MSS 807, File 1, "History of VLTA", no author, 1933.

45. Ibid.

46. Letter from VLTA to members, September 17, 1932.


48. CVA, Add.MSS 807, File 3, No author [Dorothy Somerset?], note reminiscing about the production Back to Methuselah, n.d.


51. Ibid.

116
52. Ibid.


54. CVA, Add.MSS 41, Vol 13, File 1, Yvonne Firkins, "Vancouver’s Little Theatre Proudly Comes of Age", unknown paper, n.d. [1941?]


58. Ibid.

59. CVA, Add.MSS 807, File 6, Jessie Richardson, "Progress and Problems of Larger City Drama Groups", 1948, p. 3.

60. Programme for Thunder Rock, March 16-18, 1942.

61. Programme for The Importance of Being Earnest, June 15-17, 1942.

62. Programme for The Willow and I, April 3-6, 1944.


CHAPTER FOUR

64. Richardson, p. 3.

65. Ibid.

66. CVA, Add.MSS 41, Vol 1, VLTA Minutes of the Board of Directors, September 4, 1951.

67. Richardson, p. 2.


69. Ibid.

71. CVA, Newspaper clippings under VLTA, "Wanted: A Playhouse", unidentified paper, October 22, 1946.

72. Jessie Richardson, Brief to the Massey Commission, p. 3. The other recommendations were "That Government scholarships be given to young Canadians showing exceptional promise in the art of Theatre...[and] That Little Theatres and like community groups of non-profit distributing calibre be exempt from amusement tax..."

73. The Little Theatre News, Vol. 1, No. 1, August 1948.

74. Jessie Richardson, "Progress and Problems", p. 3.

75. Elmore Philpott, "Big Little Theatre", The Vancouver Sun, October 27, 1948, p. 4.


78. Ibid.


80. Ibid.


83. Philpott, p. 4.

84. Naomi Lang, "Gruff but Gifted: Director Ian Dobbie may heap insults on actors' heads but they all agree 'he's temperamental - but terrific'", B.C. Magazine, January 10, 1953, p. 7.


86. Quoted by Lang, p. 7.

87. Jessie Richardson, Brief to the Massey Commission, loc. cit.

89. Lang, p. 7.


91. Paddy Daly, "Happenings in the World of Drama", *The Vancouver Sun*, June 24, 1950, p. 6.

92. Ibid.

93. Paddy Daly, "Happenings in the World of Drama", *The Vancouver Sun*, June 30, 1951, p. 6.


95. Paddy Daly, "Happenings in the World of Drama", September 15, 1951, p. 10.

96. Programme for *Tovarich*, December 1952.


98. Margaret Rushton, President's Notes in VLTA programme for *Room Service*, October 1953.


100. Quoted by Sedawie, loc. cit.

101. Ibid., quoted by Sedawie.

102. VLTA Programme for *Thieves' Carnival*, January 1954.

CHAPTER FIVE


111. Ibid.


113. Ben Metcalfe, "There's more than 'two planks and a passion' to Little Theatre's offering today", The Daily Province, September 17, 1960, p. 18.

114. Mike Tytherleigh, "QET is deserted in Theatre Battle", The Vancouver Sun, January 11, 1961.

115. Ibid.


117. Ibid. In unrelated developments concerning the "Panrucker dealings", John Panrucker was arrested and tried for theft and breach of booking agreements in 1960. He was accused of stealing over $20,000 and forging paycheques. He received a four-year sentence, served two and a half years, and then was deported back to England. It seems he had served a two-year jail term in England for similar charges, to which he never admitted when he emigrated to Canada. He had been the general manager for the QET since October 1957.


123. The Daily Province, August 14, 1962.


128. VLTA programme for The Father, November-December 1965.

129. CVA, Add.MSS 41, Vol. 1, File 4, VLTA list of Executive positions.


132. "Facelift for a Gallant Old Lady", The Vancouver Sun, September 12, 1969, p. 4A.


134. Ibid.


139. CVA, Add.MSS 596 F 1, File 2, VLTA Minutes, June 22, 1973.


141. CVA, Add.MSS 597 F 4, File 4, VLTA History Highlights.

142. Ibid.
CHAPTER SIX

143. Colin Funk and Connie Brill interview, May 1, 1992, Banff, Alberta. All other quotations not annotated in this chapter are from this interview.

144. CVA, Add.MSS 597 F 6, File 7, Transcript of Interview with Dorothy Somerset, conducted by Connie Brill and Kate Hull, August 28, 1985.
Most of this paper is drawn from the archival collection of VLTA at the Vancouver City Archives. The collection is large, and covers many aspects of the theatre company's existence. There are two main VLTA acquisitions at the Archives, one given to the city by Sheila Neville in 1971 (CVA Add.MSS 41), the other by Connie Brill and Colin Funk in 1985 (Add.MSS 596 and 597). These collections contain all of the correspondence, minutes, photos and most of the articles and programmes used in this paper. Other manuscript collections used were:

Sheila Neville (Add.MSS 807)
Phoebe Smith (Add.MSS 57)
Yvonne Firkins (Add.MSS 93)
E.V. Young (Add.MSS 1064)

As well, the CVA newspaper clippings (both the Major J.S. Matthews' and the CVA collections) and pamphlets listings were used.

Some interviews were conducted, as well as informal conversations.

January 29, 1992 - Guy and Marion Palmer, Vancouver
April 14, 1992 - Connie Brill, by telephone
May 1, 1992 - Colin Funk and Connie Brill, Banff, Alberta
Periodically - Gay Scrivener, Vancouver
Finally, the following books and articles proved useful:


"Little Theatre is Making Progress". *The Daily Province*. Vancouver, December 16, 1921.

"Little Theatre is Scene of Three Clever Sketches". *The Vancouver Sun*. Vancouver, December 16, 1921.


APPENDIX A

Presidents of the Vancouver Little Theatre Association, 1921-1978

1921-23  R.L. Reid, KC
1923-29  W.G. Murrin - 1923-29
1929-31  B.D.G. Phillips
1931-32  J.P.D. Malkin, E.V. Young
1932-33  Percy Gomery
1933-37  General V.W. Odlum
1937-38  H.H. Simmonds
1938-39  E.G. Mather
1939-43  Major Ed Gallant
1943-45  Mrs. Phoebe Smith
1945-46  Donald Cromie
1947-48  Van Norman
1948-51  Mrs. Jessie Richardson
1951-52  Mrs. Yvonne Firkins (to February)
1952-56  Mrs. Margaret Rushton (from February)
1956-58  Willson Knowlton
1958-59  Dorothy Goldrick
1959-60  Claire O’Sullivan
1960-62  John Read
1962-64  Sheila Neville
1964-65  Dalton Allan
1965-66  Rene Diekman
1966-68  John Read
1968-70  Jack Neville
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>Bud Lando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>John Read/Roger Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>Walter Shynkaryk</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>Carol Roberts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>Stan Winfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>Tania Murenko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>Terry Marshall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

List of Plays Produced by the VLTA: 1921-78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAY and DATE</th>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>DIRECTOR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST SEASON: 1921-22</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3-5, 1921, TEMPLETON HALL</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonesomelike</td>
<td>Harold Brighouse</td>
<td>F.G.C. Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Intruder</td>
<td>Maurice Maeterlinck</td>
<td>Garfield King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stepmother</td>
<td>Arnold Bennett</td>
<td>G.H. Warde</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 15-17, 1921</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppressed Desires</td>
<td>Susan Glaspell &amp; George Cram Cook</td>
<td>Garfield King &amp; D.W. Bridal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Land of Heart’s Desire</td>
<td>W.B. Yeats</td>
<td>Herbert Beeman</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lost Silk Hat</td>
<td>Lord Dunsany</td>
<td>A.E. Craddock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 16-18, 1922</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint Owners in Spain</td>
<td>Alice Brown</td>
<td>Gwen. Moore</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the Shadow of the Glen</td>
<td>J.M. Synge</td>
<td>E.V. Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham</td>
<td>F.L. Tompkins</td>
<td>D.W. Bridal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 20-22, 1922</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wurzel-Flummery</td>
<td>A.A. Milne</td>
<td>D.W. Bridal</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Heart of a Clown</td>
<td>C. Powell-Anderson</td>
<td>E.M. Coney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena’s Husband</td>
<td>Philip Moeller</td>
<td>E.V. Young</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 25-27, 1922</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Impertinence of the Creature</td>
<td>Cosomo Gordon-Lennox</td>
<td>Gwen. Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Monkey’s Paw</td>
<td>W.W. Jacobs</td>
<td>D.W. Bridal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtones</td>
<td>Alice Gerstenberg</td>
<td>H.B. Coleman</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SECOND SEASON: 1922-23</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>October 19-21, 1922</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Matches</td>
<td>I.E. MacKay</td>
<td>F.G.C. Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Night at an Inn</td>
<td>Lord Dunsany</td>
<td>E.V. Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rest Cure</td>
<td>Gertude Jennings</td>
<td>D.W. Bridal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 30, Dec. 1-2, 1922</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dust of the Road</td>
<td>Kenneth Goodman</td>
<td>Helen Badgeley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boccaccio’s Untold Tale</td>
<td>Harry Kemp</td>
<td>Mrs. J. Gibson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everybody’s Husband</td>
<td>Gilbert Cannan</td>
<td>H. Treby Heale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

127
January 25-27, 1923  
**Augustus in Search of a Father** Harold Chapin  
**The Sweetmeat Game** Ruth C. Mitchell  
**Possession** Laurence Housman  
Frank Johnstone  
D.W. Bridal  
S. Wellwood

March 22-24, 1923  
**Sicilian Limes** Luigi Pirandello  
**Trifles** Susan Glaspell  
**The Angel Intruders** Floyd Dell  
James Leyland  
Harold Bechtel  
R.M. Eassie

May 2-5, 11-12, 1923  
**Dear Brutus** J.M. Barrie  
M. Reynolds  
& E.V. Young

### THIRD SEASON: 1923-24

November 7-10, 1923, LITTLE THEATRE (later the York)  
**The Dover Road** A.A. Milne  
E.V. Young

December 13-15, 1923  
**'Op-O'–Me-Thumb** Frederic Fenn & Richard Price  
Edgar Smith

**Fame and the Poet** Lord Dunsany  
**The Locked Chest** John Masefield  
James Ferguson  
D.W. Bridal

February 6-9, 1924  
**The Barrel** E. St. V. Millay  
**Masks** George Middleton  
**The Dear Departed** Stanley Houghton  
**When the Whirlwind Blows** Essex Dane  
E.A. Woodward  
D.W. Bridal  
R.M. Eassie  
Frank Johnstone

April 2-5, 1924  
**A Bill of Divorcement** Clemence Dane  
D.W. Bridal

May 14-17, 1924  
**The Truth about Blayds** A.A. Milne  
Frank Johnstone

### FOURTH SEASON: 1924-25

October 21-25, 1924  
**R.U.R.** Karel Capek  
F. Johnstone & B.G.D. Philips

December 3-6, 1924  
**Fancy Free** Stanley Houghton  
**The Monkey's Paw** W.W. Jacobs  
**The Rim of the World** Floyd Dell  
E.V. Young  
Frank Johnstone  
Mrs J. Farquhar

February 9-14, 1925  
**The Devil's Disciple** G.B. Shaw  
Mrs E. Woodward

128
April 1—4, 1925
Night
Ryland
How He Lied to Her Husband
May 26—30, 1925
Tilly of Bloomsbury

FIFTH SEASON: 1925-26

October 19—24, 1925
Outward Bound
Sutton Vane
E.V. Young

December 9—12, 1925
The Swan
Ferenc Molnar
Anne Ferguson

February 10—13, 1926
The Connoisseur
Great Catherine
Marjorie Reynolds
G.B. Shaw
M. Reynolds
Jack Gillmore

March 23—27, 1926
He Who Gets Slapped
Leonid Andreyev
Mrs E. Woodward

May 6—8, 13—15, 1926
Aren't We All
Frederick Lonsdale
Frank Johnstone

SIXTH SEASON: 1926-27

October 12—16, 1926
The Torch Bearers
George Kelly
Anne Ferguson

December 1—4, 1926
The Pigeon
John Galsworthy
Leonard Miller

February 8—12, 1927
The Pillars of Society
Henrik Ibsen
Sam Wellwood & Yvonne Firkins

Mar. 29—31, Apr. 1&2, 1927
Arms and the Man
G.B. Shaw
Mrs. G. Gibson
& E.B. Clegg

May 3—7, 1927
Hay Fever
Noel Coward
S. J. Battle
SEVENTH SEASON: 1927-28

October 18—22, 1927
The Circle
Somerset Maugham
Frank Johnstone

December 13—17, 1927
The Bad Man
R. Emerson Browne
Mrs. E. Woodward

February 14—18, 1928
Liliom
Ferenc Molnar
B.G.D. Philips

March 27—31, 1928
The Admirable Crichton
J.M. Barrie
E.V. Young

May 8—12, 1928
Yellow Sands
E. & A. Philpotts
Leonard Miller

EIGHTH SEASON: 1928-29

October 17—20, 1928
What Every Woman Knows
J.M. Barrie
Eily Malyon

November 14—17, 1928
The Critic
Richard Sheridan
Frank Johnstone

Jan. 30, 31, Feb. 1, 2, 1929
Loyalties
John Galsworthy
R.M. Eassie

March 20—23, 1929
The Lilies of the Field
John H. Turner
Yvonne Firkins

April 24—27, 1929
The Silver Cord
Sidney Howard
B.G.D. Phillips

NINTH SEASON: 1929-30

October 16—19, 1929
The Liars
Henry Arthur
Frank Johnstone

November 20—23, 1929
At Mrs. Beam's
C.K. Munro
Paul Chalfont

February 6—8, 1930
John Ferguson
St. John G. Ervine
Garfield King

March 19—22, 1930
Shall We Join the Ladies?
Androcles and the Lion
J.M. Barrie
Clare Sumner
G.B. Shaw
Mrs. E. Woodward
April 23–26, 1930
The Queen’s Husband R.E. Sherwood B.G.D. Phillips

TENTH SEASON: 1930–31

October 29–31, 1930
Escape John Galsworthy A.J. Greathed

December 3–6, 1930
The Cradle Song G. Martinez Sierra B.G.D. Phillips

February 5–7, 1931
A Perfect Alibi A.A. Milne Frank Johnstone

March 25–28, 1931
Dear Brutus (revival) J.M. Barrie E.V. Young

Apr. 30, May 1,2, 1931 (fiftieth regular production)
Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary St. John G. Ervine G.F. Scott

ELEVENTH SEASON: 1931–32

October 7–10, 1931
The Theatre of the Soul Evreinov Harry Tauber
The Golden Doom Lord Dunsany Edythe Yates
Sabotage W. Valcross & Hilda Keatley
Paul d’Estoc
Lady Gregory W. Rankin

December 16–19, 1931
The Workhouse Ward

The Second Man S.N. Behrman E.A. Woodward

February 11–13, 1932
All The King’s Horses Charles Openshaw G. Roy Kievill

March 18–19, 1932
Just Married Adelaide Matthews Jack Flanagan

May 6–7, 1932
The Mask and the Face Luigi Chiarelli B.G.D. Phillips

TWELFTH SEASON: 1932–33

October 21–22, 1932
East of Suez Somerset Maugham Hilda Keatley & Frank Johnstone

November 4–5, 1932
Love and Chance Marivaux Jean Mercier
December 16-17, 1932
The Pelican
F.T. Jesse & H.W. Harwood
B.G.D. Phillips

March 10-11, 1933
Captain Brassbound's Conversion
G.B. Shaw
Carleton Clay

May 18-20, 1933
Good Morning Bill
P.G. Wodehouse
Frank Johnstone

THIRTEENTH SEASON: 1933-34

October 5-7, 1933
Elizabeth the Queen
Maxwell Anderson
Frank Johnstone

November 16-18, 1933
Olympia
Ferenc Molnar
B.G.D. Phillips

January 26-27, 1934
A Doll's House
Henrik Ibsen
Carleton Clay

May 11-12, 1934
Meadchen in Uniform
Christa Winslow
Yvonne Firkins

May 31, June 1-2, 1934
The Royal Family
G.S. Kaufman & Edna Ferber
E. Woodward

FOURTEENTH SEASON: 1934-35

October 17-20, 1934
The Late Christopher Bean
Emlyn Williams
B.G.D. Phillips

December 13-15, 1934
Tobias and the Angel
James Bridie
D. Somerset

February 8-9, 1935
Uncle Vanya
Anton Chekhov
Guy Glover

May 3-4, 1935
The Shining Hour
Keith Winter
Mrs A. Soames

May 22-25, 1935
Fear
A. Afinogenyev
Yvonne Firkins
**FIFTEENTH SEASON: 1935-36**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Play</th>
<th>Director1</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 25, 1935, STANLEY THEATRE</td>
<td>Ten Minute Alibi</td>
<td>Anthony Armstrong</td>
<td>Leonard Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 24, 1936, STANLEY THEATRE</td>
<td>Squaring the Circle</td>
<td>Valentine Katayev</td>
<td>F.J.C. Ramage</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 9, 1936, STANLEY THEATRE</td>
<td>Madame Butterfly</td>
<td>David Belasco</td>
<td>G.F. Scott</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pierrot the Prodigal</td>
<td>Michel Carre &amp; Andre Wormser</td>
<td>Vivien Ramsay</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 11, 1936, U.B.C. AUDITORIUM</td>
<td>Mary of Scotland</td>
<td>Maxwell Anderson</td>
<td>Frank Johnstone</td>
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**SIXTEENTH SEASON: 1936-37**

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<th>Date</th>
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<th>Play</th>
<th>Director1</th>
<th>Director2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 29-31, 1936, LITTLE THEATRE</td>
<td>If This Be Treason</td>
<td>J.H. Holmes &amp; R. Lawrence</td>
<td>D. Somerset</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 7-9, 1936</td>
<td>The Makropoulos Secret</td>
<td>Karel Capek</td>
<td>Yvonne Firkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 18-20, 1937</td>
<td>Is Life Worth Living</td>
<td>Lennox Robinson</td>
<td>G.F. Scott</td>
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**SEVENTEENTH SEASON: 1937-38**

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<th>Director2</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 1-2, 1937</td>
<td>Laburnum Grove</td>
<td>J.B. Priestley</td>
<td>Leonard Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 6-7, 1937</td>
<td>Judgement Day</td>
<td>Elmer Rice</td>
<td>Yvonne Firkins</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 11-12, 1938</td>
<td>Interference</td>
<td>Harold Deardon &amp; Roland Pertwee</td>
<td>Frank Johnstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8-9, 1938</td>
<td>George and Margaret</td>
<td>Gerald Savoury</td>
<td>Barbara West</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>May 27-28, 1938</td>
<td>Double Door</td>
<td>Elizabeth McFadden</td>
<td>A. Deuber</td>
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</table>
EIGHTEENTH SEASON: 1938-39

October 28-29, 1938
Winter Sunshine

December 9-10, 1938
A Murder Has Been Arranged

February 9-11, 1939
Idiot's Delight

March 17, 1939, STANLEY THEATRE
Paolo and Francesca

April 28-29, 1939
Lady Precious Stream

NINETEENTH SEASON: 1939-40

October 19-21, 1939
Susan And God

December 14-16, 1939
Chanticleer

February 8-10, 1940
Yes My Darling Daughter

April 1-3, 1940
Night Must Fall

May 20-22, 1940
Full House

TWENTIETH SEASON: 1940-41

October 21-23, 1940
Tony Draws a Horse

December 2-4, 1940
The White Steed

February 17-20, 1941
The Guardsman

March 17-19, 1941
Dangerous Corner

April 28-30, 1941
Kind Lady
TWENTY-FIRST SEASON: 1941-42

October 20-22, 1941
Flight to the West Elmer Rice Phoebe Smith

December 8-11, 1941
Bunty Pulls the Strings Graham Moffatt Yvonne Firkins

March 16-18, 1942
Thunder Rock Robert Ardrey Ivy Ralston

May 4-6, 1942
Out of the Frying Pan Frances Swann Tom Sherwood

June 15-17, 1942
The Importance of Being Earnest Oscar Wilde Leonard Miller

TWENTY-SECOND SEASON: 1942-43

November 16-19, 1942
Watch on the Rhine Lillian Hellman Phoebe Smith

December 14-16, 1942
Priorities Various Vivien Ramsay T. Sherwood

February 15-19, 1943
Arsenic and Old Lace J. Kesselring Mrs A. Graham

April 12-14, 1943
Ladies in Retirement Edward Percy & C. Chanter
Reg. Denham

May 31, Jun 1-3, 1943
The Philadelphia Story Philip Barry Nancy Caldwell

TWENTY-THIRD SEASON: 1943-44

October 3-5, 1943
Dark Eyes Elena Maramova Phoebe Smith

December 6-8, 1943
Autumn Crocus C.L. Anthony C. Chanter

February 21-24, 1944
Accent on Youth S. Raphelson John Bethune

April 3-6, 1944
The Willow and I John Patrick Ivy Ralston
May 29–31, June 1, 1944
There's Always Juliet                     J. Van Druten      John Bethune

TWENTY-FOURTH SEASON: 1944-45

October 30-31, November 1-2, 1944
Junior Miss                           Jerome Chodorov & Joseph Fields
                                      Phoebe Smith

December 4-6, 1944
Suspect                               Edward Percy & Reg. Dunham
                                      Ivy Ralston

February 12-16, 1945
Pygmalion                              G.B. Shaw            C. Chanter

April 9-11, 1945
Old Acquaintance                      J. Van Druten      John Bethune

May 18-22, 1945
Mashenka                                Alex. Afinegenov   Sam Payne

TWENTY-FIFTH SEASON: 1945-46

October 15-19, 1945
My Sister Eileen                       Joseph Fields & Jerome Chodorov
                                      Elsie Graham

December 3-7, 1945
Guest in the House                    Hagar Wilde & Dale Bunson
                                      Phoebe Smith

February 11-15, 1946
Major Barbara                           G.B. Shaw            C. Chanter

March 25-29, 1946
Hamlet                                Shakespeare          F.L. Smith

May 27-31, 1946
Blithe Spirit                          Noel Coward          Ivy Ralston

TWENTY-SIXTH SEASON: 1946-47

October, 1946
You Can't Take It With You           G.S. Kaufman & Moss Hart
                                      Phoebe Smith
December, 1946  
Dear Brutus  
J.M. Barrie  

February, 1947  
Angel Street  
Patrick Hamilton  

March, 1947  
Our Town  
Thornton Wilder  

May, 1947  
Private Lives  
Noel Coward  

TWENTY-SEVENTH SEASON: 1947-48

November 17-21, 1947  
George Washington Slept Here  
Moss Hart & G.S. Kaufman  

February 2-6, 1948  
The Dover Road  
A.A. Milne  

March 8-12, 1948  
Golden Boy  
Clifford Odets  

April 19-23, 1948  
Dear Ruth  
Norman Kresme  

May 31, June 1-4, 1948  
Elizabeth Sleeps Out  
Leslie Howard  

TWENTY-EIGHTH SEASON: 1948-49

October 8-12, 1948  
While the Sun Shines  
Terence Rattigan  

November 29-30, December 1-3, 1948  
Deep are the Roots  
Armid d’Usseau  

February 7-11, 1949  
As You Like It  
Shakespeare  

March 28-31, April 1, 1949  
Pick-up Girl  
Elsa Shelley  

May 9-13, 1949  
For Love or Money  
F.H. Herbert  

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TWENTY-NINTH SEASON: 1949-50

October 11-14, 1949
Quiet Weekend                  Esther Cracken  Ian Dobbie

November 28-30, December 1-2, 1949
Candida                        G.B. Shaw       C. Chanter

February 13-17, 1950
Love From a Stranger           Frank Vosper   Doris Owen

March 27-31, 1950
Peace in Our Time              Noel Coward    Ian Dobbie

May 15-19, 1950
Born Yesterday                 Garson Kanin    Ian Dobbie

THIRTIETH SEASON: 1950-51

October 10-14, 1950
See How They Run                Philip King     Ian Dobbie

November 29-30, December 1-3, 1950
Cry Havoc                      Allen Kenwold  Ian Dobbie

January 12-16, 1951
The Second Man                 J.N. Richman   C. Chanter

February 26-28, March 1-2 1951
Another Part of the Forest     Lillian Hellman Ian Dobbie

April 23-27, 1951
This Happy Breed               Noel Coward    Doris Owen

May 28-June 1, 1951
Three Men on a Horse           J.C. Holm &  George Abbott Ian Dobbie

THIRTY-FIRST SEASON

October 22-26, 1951
The Madwoman of Chaillot       Jean Giraudoux  Yvonne Firkins

December 3-7, 1951
The Corn Is Green              Emlyn Williams  Phoebe Smith

February 4-8, 1952
Father of the Bride            Caroline French  Juan Root
March 24-28, 1952
Tempted Tried and True  Bill Johnson  Bob Reed
May 12-16, 1952
Anna Christie  Eugene O'Neill  C. Chanter

THIRTY-SECOND SEASON: 1952-53

October 29-31, November 1-2, 1952
Rain  Somerset Maugham  Phoebe Smith
December 1-5
Tovarich  Jacques Rival  C. Chanter
February 2-6, 1953
O Mistress Mine  Terence Rattigan  Guy Palmer
March 16-20, 1953
A Man About the House  John Perry  Ian Dobbie
April 27-May 1, 1953
The Man  Mel Dinelli  John Thorne

THIRTY-THIRD SEASON: 1953-54

October 19-23, 1953
Room Service  L.J. Huber  Phoebe Smith
November 30, December 1-4, 1953
Pillars of Society  Henrik Ibsen  Frank Crowson
January 25-29, 1954
Thieves' Carnival  Jean Anouilh  Guy Palmer
March 15-19, 1954
Stalag 17  Bevan Trzenski  Bob Read
May 3-7, 1954
Anna Lucasta  P. Youdan  Phoebe Smith

THIRTY-FOURTH SEASON: 1954-55

October 18-22, 1954
The Deep Blue Sea  Terence Rattigan  Peter Mannering
November 29-December 3, 1954
The Curious Savage  J. Patrick  Bob Read

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January 31-February 4, 1955
Craig's Wife
G. Kelly
Frank Crowson

March 28-April 1, 1955
Ten Little Indians
Agatha Christie
Guy Palmer

May 16-20, 1955
Two Dozen Red Roses
A. de Benedetti
Phoebe Smith

THIRTY-FIFTH SEASON: 1955-56

October 17-21, 1955
Sabrina Fair
S. Taylor
Sam Payne

November 28-December 3, 1955
Darkness at Noon
S. Kingsley
Ian Thorne

February 6-11, 1956
Dear Charles
Allan Melville
Phoebe Smith

March 26-31, 1956
The Tender Trap
Max Shulman & R.P. Smith
Otto Lowy

May 7-12, 1956
The Seven Year Itch
G. Axelrod
Gertrude Dennis

THIRTY-SIXTH SEASON: 1956-57

October 8-13, 1956
The King of Hearts
Jean Kerr & Eleanor Brooke
Sam Payne

November 26-December 1, 1956
Anastasia
M. Mourette
Joan Chapman

February 11-16, 1957
The Fifth Season
Sylvia Regan
Phoebe Smith

March 25-30, 1957
The Festival
S. & B. Spewack
Guy Palmer

May 8-18, 1957
Mr. Roberts
T. Heggen & Joshua Logan
Bob Read

June 3-8, 1957
One Wild Oat
V. Sylvaine
Phoebe Smith

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### THIRTY-SEVENTH SEASON: 1957-58

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Casts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 14-19, 1957</td>
<td>The Time of the Cuckoo</td>
<td>A. Laurents</td>
<td>Phoebe Smith</td>
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<td>November 18-23, 1957</td>
<td>The Moment of Truth</td>
<td>Peter Ustinov</td>
<td>Joan Chapman</td>
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<td>January 30-February 8, 1958</td>
<td>Witness for the Prosecution</td>
<td>Agatha Christie</td>
<td>Yvonne Firkins</td>
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<td>February 27-March 8, 1958</td>
<td>Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?</td>
<td>George Axelrod</td>
<td>Otto Lowy</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 21-May 3, 1958</td>
<td>Teahouse of the August Moon</td>
<td>John Patrick</td>
<td>Joy Coghill</td>
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### THIRTY-EIGHTH SEASON: 1958-59

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 16-25, 1958</td>
<td>Inherit the Wind</td>
<td>J. Lawrence &amp; R.E. Lee</td>
<td>Franklin Johnson</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 20-29, 1958</td>
<td>The Lark</td>
<td>Jean Anouilh</td>
<td>Ian Thorne</td>
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<td>February 12-21, 1959</td>
<td>The Matchmaker</td>
<td>Thornton Wilder</td>
<td>Peter Mannering</td>
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<td>March, 1959</td>
<td>Desperate Hours</td>
<td>J. Hayes</td>
<td>Bob Read</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30-May 9, 1959</td>
<td>Waltz of the Toreadors</td>
<td>Jean Anouilh</td>
<td>Yvonne Firkins</td>
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### THIRTY-NINTH SEASON: 1959-60

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Casts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QUEEN ELIZABETH AUDITORIUM</td>
<td>Visit to a Small Planet</td>
<td>Gore Vidal</td>
<td>Jorn Winther</td>
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<td>December 2-5, 17-19, 1959, QET</td>
<td>Dial M For Murder</td>
<td>Frederick Knott</td>
<td>Sam Payne</td>
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<td>January 12-16, 1960, QET</td>
<td>A View from the Bridge</td>
<td>Arthur Miller</td>
<td>Ian Thorne</td>
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<tr>
<td>QET</td>
<td>Tea and Sympathy</td>
<td>Robert Anderson</td>
<td>Hans Hartog</td>
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</table>
May 31, June 1-4, 1960
Tunnel of Love                      Joseph Fields

FORTIETH SEASON: 1960-61

November 17-19, 1960, QET
Orpheus Descending                   Tennessee Williams  Ian Thorne

January 1961, INTERNATIONAL CINEMA
Crime and Punishment                 Dostoyevsky            Ian Thorne

INTERNATIONAL CINEMA
Dear Charles                          Allan Melville          D. Goldrick

May 23—27, 1961, INTERNATIONAL CINEMA
Anniversary Waltz                     Jerome Chodorov         D. Goldrick
& Joseph Fields

FORTY-FIRST SEASON: 1961-62

September 28-30, October 3-7, 1961, YORK THEATRE
Man and Superman                      G.B. Shaw               Roy Brinson

December 6-9, 12-16, 1961
The Flowering Peach                  Clifford Odets            Otto Lowy

February 8-10, 13-17, 1962
The Happy Time                        Samuel Taylor            Hans Hartog

March 29-31, April 2-7, 1962
Captain Carvallo                      Denis Cannon              D. Goldrick

June 21-23, 26-30, 1962
Janus                                  Carolyn Green            Jean Glen

FORTY-SECOND SEASON: 1962-63

January 29-30, February 1-2, 1963, PLAYHOUSE THEATRE
Write Me a Murder                      Frederick Knott          Otto Lowy

April 2-6, 1963, PLAYHOUSE
Oh Men! Oh Women!                      Edward Chodorov          Otto Lowy

May 21-25, 1963
The Climate of Eden                    Moss Hart                Hans Hartog
FORTY-THIRD SEASON: 1963-64

September 1963, METRO THEATRE
The Hollow                        Agatha Christie       John Parker
January 14-18, 1964, YORK THEATRE
Clarembard                        Marcel Ayme            Dorothy Davies
May 5-9, 1964
Angels in Love                    Hugh Mills             Jean Glen

FORTY-FOURTH SEASON: 1964-65

October 23-31, 1964, METRO THEATRE
The Time of the Cuckoo            A. Laurents           D. Goldrick
December 1964, YORK THEATRE
The Princess and the Swineheard   Nicolas Stuart Grey
January 26-30, 1965
The Night of the Iguana           Tennessee Williams     Tony Rogers
April 6-10, 1965
The Gazebo                        Alec Coppel            Frank Gurry

FORTY-FIFTH SEASON: 1965-66

October 8-16, 1965, METRO THEATRE
Invitation to a March             Arthur Laurents        Eileen Cavalier
November 30-December 4, 1965, YORK THEATRE
The Father                        August Strindberg      John Parker
June 2-18, 1966 (beginning of Thurs-Fri-Sat performances only)
The Fantasticks                   Tom Jones & Harvey Schmidt

FORTY-SIXTH SEASON: 1966-67

October 20-November 5, 1966
The Tempest                        Shakespeare           John Parker
January 12-28, 1967
Lord Arthur Saville's Crime        Constance Cox         John Parker
March 25, 27, April 1, 1967
Red Shoes                          Robin Short            Bob Read
May 18–June 3, 1967
Lysistrata
Aristophanes
John Parker

FORTY-SEVENTH SEASON: 1967-68

October 1967
Luther
John Osborne
John Parker

November 16–December 2, 1967
Ladies in Retirement
Edward Perry & Reginald Denham
Laurie Lynds

February 15–March 2, 1968
The Elephant and the Jewish Question
Beverley Simons

April 13, 15–20, 1968
Sleeping Beauty
Chris Wiggins
Vincent Burt

June 6–22, 1968
Once Upon a Mattress
Mary Rodgers
John Parker

FORTY-EIGHTH SEASON: 1968-69

October 3–19, 1968
Dark of the Moon
Howard Richardson & William Berney
Bob Read

November 21–December 7, 1968
Wait Until Dark
Frederick Knott
John Parker

January 9–25, 1969
The Offshore Island
Marghanita Laski
Stuart Baker

February 20–March 8, 1969
A Taste Of Honey
Shelagh Delaney
Vincent Burt

April 5, 7–12, 1969
The Sadness Thief
Leo Burdak
Jerry Zawerska

June 5–21, 1969
Tartuffe
Molière
John Parker

FORTY-NINTH SEASON: 1969-70

November 8, 13–22, 1969
King Lear
Shakespeare
John Parker
January 15-24, 1970  
Lovers  
Brian Friel  
George Plowski

May 14-30, 1970  
Your Own Thing  
Hal Hester & Danny Apolinar  
John Parker

FIFTIETH SEASON: 1970-71

September 26, October 2-10, 1970  
Private Lives  
Noel Coward  
Jace van der Veen

December 3-12, 1970  
Bull Durham  
Jeremy Newson  
John Gray

January 28-30, February 4-6, 1971  
The Laundry  
David Guerdon  
Jace van der Veen

April 10, 12-17, 1971  
The Strange Disappearance of Princess Gloriana  
Ray Logie  
Jane Logie

May 13- 22, 1971  
Great Expectations  
Charles Dickens  
Jace van der Veen

FIFTY-FIRST SEASON: 1971-72

October 28-November 13, 1971  
A Man for All Seasons  
Robert Bolt  
Michael Berry

February 10-26, 1972  
Johnny Belinda  
Elmer Harris  
Don Eccleston

May 17-June 2, 1972  
Hotel Paradiso  
Georges Feydeau & Maurice Desvallieres  
Michael Berry

FIFTY-SECOND SEASON: 1972-73

October 25-November 3, 1972  
That Scoundrel Scapin  
Molière  
Michael Ball

January 17-February 2, 1973  
Period of Adjustment  
Tennessee Williams  
Michael Ball
March 14–30, 1973
The Chalk Garden

May, 1973
The Hostage

FIFTY-THIRD SEASON: 1973-74

October 25–26, 1973
Impromptu
Devil among the Skeins

November 8–24, 1973
Mrs. Warren’s Profession

May 23–June 8, 1974
Richard III

FIFTY-FOURTH SEASON: 1974-75

November–December 1974
Romeo and Juliet

February–March 1975
Love’s Labour’s Lost

May 1975
Twelfth Night

FIFTY-FIFTH SEASON: 1975-76

Fall 1975
The Maltese Falcon

February 1976
Red Emma

May 18–June 5, 1976
Indians

FIFTY-SIXTH SEASON: 1976-77

October 7–23, 1976
The Fantasticks
February 1977
A Thousand Clowns Herb Gardner Michael Berry

FIFTY-SEVENTH SEASON: 1977-78

Listen to the Wind James Reaney Ian Fenwick