



## TIMELINE

1961 ► The Beaverbrook Auditorium Act is created by the Legislature of New Brunswick to manage The Playhouse (Beaverbrook Auditorium).

1964 ► The Playhouse opens as a 1000 seat, white Georgian style building. 250 balcony seats, 750 orchestra level.

1964 ► The Beaverbrook's commission Irish artist, Sidney Smith, to paint the 40 x 10 foot lobby mural, *The Masked Ball*.

1964 - 1969 ► The Playhouse operates as a "roadhouse" or rental facility for touring performances.

1968 ► Walter Learning is appointed General Manager of the Playhouse and decides to make the Playhouse a producing home for a professional theatre company named *Theatre New Brunswick*.

1969 ► The Playhouse acquires a 1968 Steinway & Sons D Series Concert Grand Piano. The piano has a current day replacement value of \$130,000.

1969 ► Theatre New Brunswick is officially founded, largely by a \$20,000 grant from the Beaverbrook Foundation.

1971 ► With a \$2 Million grant from the Beaverbrook Foundation, the Playhouse is upgraded to better accommodate producing theatre - the fly tower is added to greatly increase the technical capabilities of the Playhouse, the box office is added and the current stage is added resulting in a loss of 237 seats. The orchestra pit remains operational but is now located in the middle of the stage.

1972 – 2003 ► TNB bases its operations out of the Playhouse, mounting several productions a year which would each then tour the province.

1978 ► Council of the Arts Fredericton begins the ONSTAGE series, an annual program of performing arts concerts taking place at the Playhouse. The popular series would run until 2006.

1988 ► The fly system is rebuilt.

2000 ► The Playhouse is sold to a new corporation, Fredericton Playhouse Inc. and given a new mandate to serve the local community. The purchase price is paid by the City of Fredericton.

2000 ► Tim Yerxa is appointed Executive Director of Fredericton Playhouse Inc.

2001 ► The @theplayhouse performing arts series begins with 20 performances.

2002 ► Theatre New Brunswick moves its production facilities out of the Playhouse but continues to stage its main stage productions there.

2002 ► The former orchestra pit (located mid stage) is decommissioned.

2003 ► The Playhouse begins selling tickets through the Internet.

2004 ► The Playhouse celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary by presenting the National Touring Production of *The Sound of Music*.

2004 ► The grand piano is completely refurbished.

2004 ► The Playhouse launches the *Take a Seat* campaign and replaces all the seating in the theatre resulting in a loss of 54 seats.

2004 ► The Education and Outreach Program is launched.

2005 ► The public washrooms are completely renovated to be larger and completely accessible.

2008 ► A new permanent concessions bar is built in the East Gallery.



## A BRIEF HISTORY

*Updated 18-06-2009*

### OPENING THE BUILDING

With a one million dollar donation from well-known cultural benefactors Lord and Lady Beaverbrook, construction of the Fredericton Playhouse (then the Beaverbrook Auditorium Inc.) was completed in 1964. The 1000-seat, Georgian-style building would become a cornerstone of the city's cultural infrastructure.

On September 26-27, 1964, the Fredericton Playhouse held its two-day, sold-out opening gala performance. Lord Beaverbrook did not live to see the opening of the building but Lady Beaverbrook was both hostess and guest-of-honour at the ceremonies. She read a moving dedication by her late husband, Lord Beaverbrook, which stated the Playhouse was built to "help the people of New Brunswick become artistically receptive and productive."

From 1964 – 1969 the Playhouse functioned primarily as a roadhouse (rental facility). A small theatre troupe, *Company of Ten*, produced several pieces at the Playhouse.

### THEATRE NEW BRUNSWICK

Walter Learning was appointed as the General Manager in 1968 and officially founded Theatre New Brunswick (TNB) in 1969, the first touring theatre company of its kind in Canada. During TNB's 36-year tenure at the Playhouse, many remarkable productions were staged earning the company a strong and healthy reputation, which it continues to enjoy today.



TNB's Young Company was formed in 1974 followed by the founding of the Theatre School in 1999.

TNB outgrew its home at the Playhouse and relocated its production facilities in 2003. Each season, the Playhouse continues to host performances staged by Theatre New Brunswick.

### INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE PLAYHOUSE

#### Public Art

*The Playhouse is home to two major pieces of public art:*



**Lobby Mural:** Upon entering the Playhouse Lobby, you are welcomed by a 40 x 10 ft mural by Irish artist Sidney Smith (1912 – 1982), commissioned by Lord and Lady Beaverbrook in 1964. *The Masked Ball* depicts 56 life-sized characters rumoured to be friends of the artist and featuring Lord and Lady Beaverbrook themselves. The artist accompanied the artwork across the Atlantic Ocean to oversee its hanging in the lobby, where it remains today.

**Fly Tower Mural:** In 1972 at the time of major renovations, the fly tower was added to greatly increase the technical capabilities of the Playhouse. In an effort to “hide” the noticeable addition, artist Tom Forrestall was commissioned to create the huge external mural, based on a theme of a present wrapped in coloured ribbons to hint at the gifts waiting inside.



### **On the Walls – East and West Galleries**

The Galleries located on either side of the auditorium have long been used for local visual artists to exhibit their work.

### **Also On the Walls – Awards, Commemorations and Dedications**

*Within the Playhouse, several awards and dedications can be found:*

**Dedication Plaque:** Commemorating the opening of the facility as a tribute to the lifelong friendship of Lord Beaverbrook at Sir James Dunn – located on the front exterior.

**Playhouse Honours:** Awarded annually to an individual for their contribution to community life through their work in the performing arts.

**Award from the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce to Walter Learning:** Recognition as Artistic Director and General Manager of The Playhouse/Theatre New Brunswick for 10 years – located in the East Gallery.

**Stephen Graham Bird 1953 – 1986:** Memorial contribution to TNB Theatre School by Bud and Peggy Bird. The Stephen Graham Bird Trust – located in the East Gallery.

**Gold Award (Green Shops 2009)** – An initiative of the City of Fredericton Green Matters Campaign, this award goes to businesses signifying a voluntary commitment to reducing the environmental impact of doing business.

**East Coast Music Awards: Venue of the Year 2006, 2007 & 2009** – located in the West Promenade.

**Fredericton Chamber of Commerce – Community Impact Award 2007** – located in the West Promenade.

**Diane London Award:** Awarded annually to a female artist who embodies the spirit and dedication of Diane London to music and the arts. The award was created in Diane’s memory and is presented at the annual River Jam event – located in the Green Room.

**Autographed Posters from Previous Shows** – The backstage and offices are littered with posters from previous performances, many of them autographed by the artists with special notes of thanks to the Playhouse for hosting them.

**CAPACOA 2003: National Presenting Organization of the Year** for the 2001-02 @theplayhouse season – located in the balcony lounge.

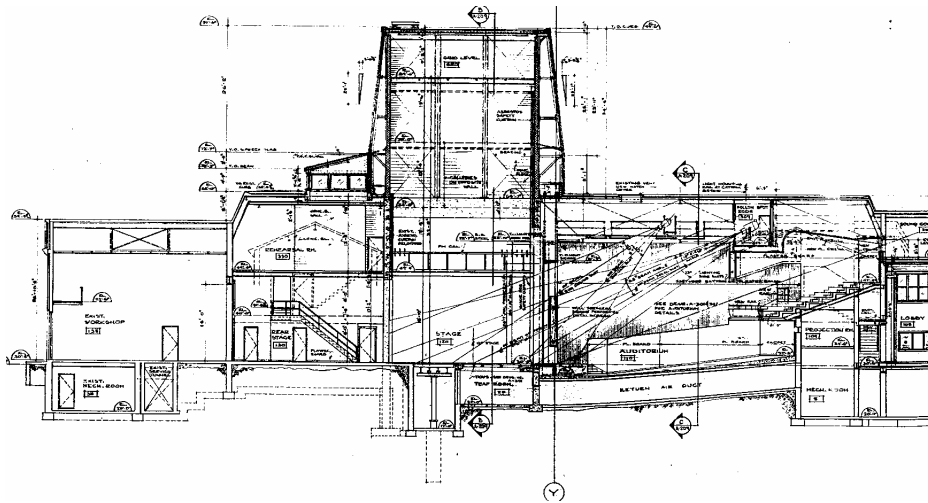
**Contact East 2005: Marketing and Promotion Award** for the development of an innovative CDROM for the 2004-05 @theplayhouse season – located in the staff lounge.

**Inscriptions and Graffiti:** In the production areas, dressing rooms, basements, and catwalks, many performers have documented their appearances at the Playhouse with notes, signatures, dates, and thoughts.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Some of the biggest names in popular entertainment have performed on the Playhouse stage at one time in their career. Celine Dion, Diana Krall, Leonard Cohen, The Guess Who, Karen Kain, Michael Bublé, and even Simon and Garfunkel have all performed at the Playhouse.

## MAJOR RENOVATIONS

**1971-72** - With a two-million dollar grant from the Beaverbrook Foundation, the Playhouse underwent major renovations in 1971-72. The fly tower was added, the orchestra pit was removed and the current stage was added resulting in a seating loss of 237. The 40-foot fly tower was added to give the stage the capacity to hang, remove and move (fly) scenery, lighting and draperies up to a maximum of 55 feet and 10,000 lbs.



**FACT OR FICTION?** Some people report that the reason that the stripe motif mural on the fly tower was added because someone was projecting pornographic films onto the large white structure from a window in the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel across Queen Street.

**2001** – The interior of the building gets a major facelift. The lobby, galleries, greenroom, dressing rooms, and offices were all redecorated.

**2002/03** – The production equipment used to stage productions is fully replaced. This includes the sound, lighting, fly systems, soft good (draperies, etc.), and the stage floor itself.

**REALLY BIG SHOW!** The largest production ever staged at the Playhouse was the touring production of *RENT* in 2006 which arrived in three full size tractor trailers and two tour busses. A local crew of more than 50 was needed to unload and mount the show.

**2004** - The Playhouse launched the *Take a Seat* fundraising campaign and replaced all the original seating in the theatre. The Playhouse is equipped with six wheel-chair seats, and 12 transfer seats on the orchestra level, and an infra-red listening assistive device for the hearing impaired.



**2005** -- The public washrooms were completely renovated in 2005 to be larger and completely accessible.

### **SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT & INSTRUMENTS**

Today the Playhouse houses state-of-the-art video, sound and lighting technology making it possible to stage full-scale Broadway productions.

The Playhouse stage has special trap doors which can be used to allow actors to travel into a sewer (*Guys and Dolls*), melt into the floor (*The Wiz/Wizard of Oz*), or lay in a grave (*Hamlet*).

The Playhouse is also equipped with Fredericton's most powerful installed video projector and a special dance floor made of "marlee".

**Grand Piano:** the Playhouse is the home of a 1969 Steinway and Sons D Series Concert Grand Piano. It is 9 x 6 feet weighing 990 lbs (480kg). The piano was refurbished in 2004 with a current day replacement value of \$130,000.

**DID YOU KNOW?** During the flood of 1973, the piano was housed in the Playhouse's flood vulnerable basement. Due to power loss, the piano was unable to be moved by elevator so was put in a sling and winched until it was suspended over the stage.

### **WHO OWNS THE PLAYHOUSE?**

The Playhouse is owned by Fredericton Playhouse Inc. a registered not-for-profit, charitable corporation. It operates under the direction of a volunteer board of directors. The Playhouse is not, nor has it ever been owned by the City of Fredericton. In June 2000, Fredericton Playhouse Inc. purchased the Fredericton Playhouse from the Beaverbrook Auditorium Inc. At the same time, Theatre New Brunswick formally became its own company. Both the Fredericton Playhouse and Theatre New Brunswick are separate organizations with individual mandates, locations and governing boards.

### **@THEPLAYHOUSE SERIES (2001-2009)**

First presented in 2001, the @theplayhouse series offered an elaborate array of presentations that covered every end of the performing arts spectrum. The award winning series featured regional, national, and international artists -- performing music, dance, theatre, and multidisciplinary arts -- to Fredericton.

## **SPOTLIGHT SERIES**

In June 2009, the Fredericton Playhouse Spotlight Series (formerly the @theplayhouse series) was launched continuing the Playhouse's flagship program of professional touring music, theatre, and dance performance. The 2009-10 series offers 36 exciting performances ranging from large-scale Broadway to intimate theatre; from edgy contemporary dance to traditional classical music; and from exotic global sounds to down home country comfort.

**STUDENT RUSH** – Launched in January 2009 this program offers \$12 best available seating for students with ID, 2 hours before show time.

## **THE PLAYHOUSE AND THE COMMUNITY: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

As early as 1967, there are records that reflect the Playhouse's commitment to be accessible to all members of the community. Launched in 2004, the present day Education and Outreach Program continues to provide access initiatives to encourage participation by all Fredericton residents. The program includes:

**EXPERIENCE MORE!** – A series of enrichment activities that take place in conjunction with Spotlight performances including *In Conversation*, *Create, Learn & Play*, and the *Master Class* series.

**SCHOOL PROGRAMMING** - A series of performances designed specifically for young audiences. The program offers the magic of live performance to area students both at the Playhouse and off-site at schools.

**eyeGO** - eyeGO was introduced in 2005 and offers high school students \$5 tickets to all Spotlight performances.



### **Fredericton Playhouse Inc.**

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