

# **An Historiographical Reading of the Founding of Canada's National Theatre School**

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# Abstract

On November 2, 1960, French director and teacher Michel Saint-Denis declared the National Theatre School of Canada (NTS)—the nation’s first professional theatre training institution—open, and the Canadian theatre—its English and French traditions—entered a new stage of professional development. But how did it get there?

This historiographical study of the NTS’ founding is the first thorough examination of the complex process through which the only bi-cultural, co-lingual school in Canada was established, from first inklings in the nineteenth century to its official opening in 1960. This dissertation utilizes Thomas Postlewait’s four-part model of historiographical theory to explore and document the various contexts which helped to shape the ways in which the School was structured, operated, and received by the public at the time it opened.

While the National Theatre School of Canada is clearly recognized as an important part of the professional Canadian theatre, it is argued here that the details of the School’s founding—even now—remain contradictory, forcing the discussion to focus more on the results of the school *after* it officially opened rather than on the ideas which created it. After half a century, it seems time to articulate, at the very least, those founding debates, adding them to Canada’s theatre history and giving them relevance in today’s increasingly diverse Canada.

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# Introduction

On November 2, 1960, French director and teacher Michel Saint-Denis declared the National Theatre School of Canada (NTS)—the nation’s first professional, bilingual theatre training institution—open, and the Canadian theatre—its English and French traditions—entered a new stage of professional development. But how did it get there? The idea of a professional theatre school in Canada was brought up as far back as the late 1800s<sup>1</sup> and became a more concrete notion in 1922 when Vincent Massey asked in his article, “The Prospects of a Canadian Drama,” if a system of professional training could help develop indigenous<sup>2</sup> drama in Canada. Massey’s question would not be answered until after World War II, when Saint-Denis—who had already established training schools in England and France—arrived at the Dominion Drama Festival Finals (DDF) in Halifax and spoke in a similar way. By 1957, with the support of leading individuals in the Canadian theatre, the planning for a *national* theatre school began in earnest.

This dissertation studies the years leading up to the establishment of the NTS in 1960. It aims to document the process through which the School was created and to amplify what already exists in Jean-Louis Roux’s, Michel Garneau’s, and Tom Hendry’s book, *l’École: Le Premier Quart de Siècle de l’École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada/ The School: The First Quarter of a Century of the National Theatre School of Canada*. Only 42 pages in length—16 in English and 26 in French—this in-house celebratory volume looks at only some of the details surrounding the School’s actual founding. Philip Spensley’s contribution to the volume, “A Brief History of the National Theatre School of Canada,” comes from his other work, “A Description and Evaluation of the Training Methods of the National Theatre School of Canada, English Acting Course,

1960-1968,” which, as the title indicates, focuses on training methods, while Jean Pol Britte’s account in *l’École/The School* is simply historical impressionism. Together, however, they do reflect something of the bi-cultural dreams of the early NTS. Yet both essentially gloss-over the cultural politics of the time.

Other scholars have studied the life and work of Saint-Denis, but also do not deal in any depth with the founding of the NTS. Among these scholars are George Berberich, Charles L. Railsback, and Jane Baldwin, who have included some brief backgrounds on the School in their dissertations only as examples of Saint-Denis’ pedagogy. Berberich’s “The Theatre Schools of Michel Saint-Denis: A Quest for Style,” Railsback’s “Michel Saint-Denis and the Organic Theatre,” and Baldwin’s “A Paradoxical Career: Michel Saint-Denis’ Life in the Theatre,” as well as her editing of Saint-Denis’ *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style and other Writings* all mention Saint-Denis’ role as an advisor to the NTS, but generally focus more on his pedagogical work in Europe and the United States.

Many questions are therefore left unanswered: whose idea was the NTS? How was the idea realized? Who was involved in the School’s creation? What were the major concerns of the founders and what were the key debates? Was there concern over the English-French issue and why was the NTS eventually created as a co-lingual school in Montreal? What kind of arguments arose from those same linguistic and cultural differences? Was this reflected in the selection of the faculty? Students? Location? Why was Saint-Denis—a French national—their artistic advisor? And how was the School to be funded and by whom?

Given that the national conversation about the School’s role and functioning continues to this day, it seemed that finding answers to some of these questions might well provide insight into the emergence of professional training for the theatre in Canada. I refer here to articles in the

popular media such as Marianne Ackerman's 1985 "Theatre School Dilemma; 'Its Reputation Just Isn't Justified'" in the *Montreal Gazette*, and J. Kelly Nestruck's 2013 "The National Theatre School Suffers from 'Montrealcentrism'" in the *Globe and Mail*. Both Ackerman and Nestruck, though writing at different times, return to the same essential questions posed during the School's creation: what is the best location for the NTS? What milieu will allow both sections of the School to develop and maintain quality work? How can the School's English and French sections inform one another's traditions? Is it possible for a genuine bi-cultural relationship to develop? Can the School adequately reflect Canada's diverse cultural climate?

Other more specialized studies are concerned with specific approaches to actor training in Canada, both in theory and in practice, and look into the deeper pedagogy of the NTS as a way of understanding the development of the Canadian theatre generally. The quarterly journal *Canadian Theatre Review* investigated pedagogy and cultural diversity in *CTR* 160 (2014), subjects which Saint-Denis himself stressed in developing the original curriculum. In that issue, Diana Belshaw and David Fancy encourage a reexamination of training systems used generally in Canadian theatre schools including the NTS, calling for a new "national conference bringing together as many of the institutions across the country as possible with professional artists and artist/teachers, students, and graduates."<sup>3</sup>

In another *CTR* essay, "Actor Training Institutions: A State of the Nation," graduates, students, and teachers of various Canadian theatre schools (including NTS) revisit the question of whether NTS training offers the skills appropriate to classical traditions and foundational techniques and asks whether theatre schools generally are "a waste of time."<sup>4</sup> In all these examinations, the complicated history of the NTS is not really taken into account because no such written history exists. We simply have not had the documentation to guide scholars and



practitioners in their investigations, information that would offer useful comparisons on aspects of Canadian culture and how they were perceived in the years after World War II. Indeed, issues surrounding tradition, culture, and language were debated extensively in the planning of the NTS. A close look at this time through the lens of the NTS throws new light on the evolution of not only the NTS and the Canadian theatre schools established later, but on many of our national cultural institutions including provincial governments and the Canada Council.

Illuminating the decisions that led to the final curriculum for the NTS also provides a contextual explanation for the School's mandate and offers insight into the roots of professional theatre training in Canada since many of the institutions that came into existence after the NTS—including York University's own theatre program—followed its lead (consciously or not). Surely, a deeper understanding of the cultural battles that were fought at that time can help today's artists and scholars understand their own traditions.

While the National Theatre School of Canada is clearly recognized as an important part of the professional Canadian theatre, it will be argued here that the details of the School's founding—even now—remain contradictory, forcing the discussion to focus more on the results of the School *after* it officially opened its doors rather than on the ideas which created it. After half a century, it seems time to articulate, at the very least, those founding debates, adding them to Canada's theatre history and giving them relevance in today's increasingly diverse Canada.

## **Methodology**

This dissertation examines the establishment of the NTS through an historiographical lens based on Thomas Postlewait's writings on theatre historiography. In his book, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, Postlewait identifies historiography as

not only the methods that define and guide the practice of historical study and writing but also the self-reflexive mindset that leads us to investigate the processes and aims of historical understanding.... [when] we study history...we can also consider some of the fundamental traits of historical thinking.<sup>5</sup>

In relation to this dissertation, not only is the historical founding of the NTS documented, but it situates and interprets the narrative within specific cultural and historical contexts, acknowledging the influences of socio-political, economic, and theatrical circumstances of the time to better understand the evolution of ideas and decisions that shaped the NTS' establishment. The aim has been to approach the material from an historiographical perspective so as to better assess current theatre training in Canada. This work cannot itself deal with all current initiatives, but hopefully it will encourage other scholars and practitioners to re-examine the NTS and other theatre schools through what Postlewait might call the material circumstances—the spaces, people, and ideas that grounded them.

To do this, this dissertation has utilized a variety of materials found in the Toronto Reference Library, the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, York University's Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, the National Archives of Canada, the Archives of Ontario, the British Library (especially for material on Saint-Denis), and the National Theatre School's own archives. Each of these resources provided a rich array of public documents and, in some cases, recordings (including film, audio, and transcripts/minutes of committee meetings). More specifically, these archives include the fonds of some of the Pro-Tem<sup>6</sup> Committee members (most of whom have now passed on) including Mavor Moore, Michel Saint-Denis, Herbert Whittaker, Herman Voaden, David Gardner, James Domville, and Donald Davis among others. Such fonds contain budget and curriculum breakdowns for the planning of the School, discussions of faculty and facilities, letters between Committee members, personal insight on the concerns and conflicts during the School's development, as well as letters between

individuals from funding organizations including the Canada Council and the UNESCO-affiliated Canadian Theatre Centre. Newspaper articles from across the country were used to help trace public awareness of NTS and political issues surrounding it at the time (especially on where to situate the School). As well, I examined transcripts and tapes of lectures by people such as Saint-Denis himself on the state of the Canadian theatre and the aims of theatre schools.

I also used newly-released oral interviews conducted in the 1970s by Professor Don Rubin for the Ontario government's Ontario Historical Studies Series (interviews basically "locked" in the vaults of the Ontario Archives and unavailable to scholars and researchers since that time). Of particular interest in this area are extended interviews with David Gardner, Donald Davis, Herbert Whittaker, Herman Voaden, and Mavor Moore, all of whom were part of the Pro-Tem Committee. These interviews provide a clear sense of the state of Canadian theatre prior to the establishment of the National Theatre School, the challenges theatre in Canada faced in its attempts to become professional, and the ways in which Canadians sought to professionalize through a professional training institution.

Sadly, there is only one still-living member of the Pro-Tem Committee (David Gardner) at this time. He was unable to participate in an interview, however, because of health. As a result, previously published interviews with him were utilized. Just before I had completed the writing, the distinguished actor-director, Diana Leblanc, herself a student in the first year of NTS, offered to meet with me and I am indebted to her for her many impressions of NTS' first year of operation.

Beyond these specific resources, I utilized several books, most notably by and about Michel Saint-Denis himself. Saint-Denis was approached by members on the National Theatre School's planning Committee early on to advise them on the School's establishment. It seems

useful here to understand the background from which this hugely influential French director and teacher comes, specifically his own training and education in classical and poetic theatre under his uncle, Jacques Copeau, at Théâtre du Vieux Colombier (“The Influence of Jacques Copeau on the Actor-Training Theories of Michel Saint-Denis” by Linda De Vries), his views of actor training generally (*Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style*), and his experience establishing other theatre schools in Europe and America (“A Paradoxical Career: Michel Saint-Denis’ Life in the Theatre” by Jane Baldwin).

Herbert Whittaker’s many published perspectives as a theatre critic for the *Globe and Mail* on the state of the Canadian theatre at this time are also revealing in his role as a Pro-Tem Committee member and shed light on his recommendations and participation in debates and the general publicity surrounding faculty and curriculum.

Numerous post-1960 sources were also looked at to provide a sense of the kinds of questions and concerns that have been raised ever since the NTS began. Articles such as the *Globe and Mail*’s “Group Considers Move for National Theatre School” (1975), Kurt Reis’ “Montreal Defending NTS” (*CTR* 74, 1993), and Michael Eagan’s “Defining a National Scenographic Style at the National Theatre School of Canada” (*CTR* 91, 1997) provoked new questions regarding aspects of the School’s founding. I examined as well Malcolm Black’s Report of 1977 on theatre training which provided additional insights.

It is important to note that consulting some original documents proved to be quite challenging. Many gaps were found in some of the personal correspondence between planning Committee members. I have done my best to acknowledge those elusive points in my endnotes, suggesting how scholars might examine them in future. Even meeting minutes were often generalized the closer they got to the School’s opening. Important aspects concerning the School

were addressed in the minutes, yet in many instances, no details were recorded. It is uncertain as to why this was the case, particularly because meetings prior to the School's opening were quite specific. Why certain details and decisions were purposefully left out of the meeting minutes might well be worth investigating on its own in another project, perhaps one more focused on the social and political implications that came with the School's founding. Finally, many original documents (including budget charts) were not always signed by their creators and many were not dated. This sometimes made it difficult to analyze them in their proper contexts.

## **Structure and Focus of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is divided into six chapters.

Chapter One looks at how, when, and why a national theatre school for Canada was proposed. It traces the inception of the idea from the late nineteenth century, when it was becoming clear that Canada lacked professional theatre training causing artists to leave the country to find that training. This chapter sets up the historical context, and therefore provides the necessary background on which understanding the complicated establishment of the NTS depends.

Chapter Two follows the formation of the early organizers and the creation of a Pro-Tem Committee to bring the professional national theatre school into being, a Committee that included such important names in Canadian theatre history as Mavor Moore, Jean-Louis Roux, Pauline McGibbon, Powys Thomas, Gratien G  linas, Herman Voaden, Donald Davis, Herbert Whittaker, and Michel Saint-Denis among others. The connections between members of the Pro-Tem Committee and other individuals and organizations is examined, as well as the relationship of the Committee to the amateur-based Dominion Drama Festival, the professionally-oriented

Canadian Theatre Centre, the Rockefeller Foundation (which was working closely with Saint-Denis on other projects), and the newly-formed Canada Council along with other federal, provincial, and municipal governments and artists who directly and indirectly influenced the Committee's decisions.

Chapter Three looks closely at the step-by-step process used by the Committee to develop the NTS model, specifically through the School's initial financial and pedagogical blueprints which also point to the challenges the organizers would face throughout their planning process. The focus of this chapter is on funding and location for the School, as well as the School's attempt at a "national" mandate and a co-lingual operational framework.

Chapter Four examines the School Blueprint, from its first to final drafts, and looks at the recommendations and responses to recommendations made by members of the various planning committees, particularly in relation to the cultural politics. More specifically, this chapter brings to light the underlying problems inherent in the conflicts between both the amateur and professional theatre communities, as well as the English and French theatre communities.

Chapter Five examines the events leading up to the School's opening day, the events and people who were finally involved, public relations statements surrounding the new School's progress, and issues that were left unresolved at the time the School opened. This chapter suggests that despite years of planning with some of Canada's leading figures, the School's future was uncertain even as it opened its doors.

The concluding chapter attempts to provide closure to some of the ongoing problems which were only resolved in the years after the School opened—especially funding and the purchase of a permanent building. This section also includes some thoughts about areas for future scholarly examination.

It is important to note that all of my research, from the start, came from official records—95 percent of which were in English without French translations to accompany them. This included meeting minutes, all drafts of the School Blueprint, briefs, reports (including the report on the French side by Yves Bourassa), newspaper articles, and even the majority of personal letters between the founders (with the exception of letters between Saint-Denis and Jean Gascon). Since the majority of these materials were presented in English, this meant that the francophone side was being represented in English.

This dissertation, then, is an anglophone view of the founding of the National Theatre School. It is a direct representation of the reality of the time regarding the cultural politics between the English- and French-speaking communities. I was unable to achieve a balance in my analysis between the two languages because at that time English was the working language, weighting the work in an English view. That said, it would be useful for a francophone researcher to seek out a francophone view on the NTS founding, someone who might be able to go into more depth with materials found in the fonds of the francophone members in the NTS planning Committees, including Jean Gascon, Jean-Louis Roux, Yves Bourassa, Gratien Gélinas, etc. From what I have seen, however, the researcher would likely be disappointed since many of the perspectives of those individuals were included in the official records consulted for this work.

## **The Idea of Bilingualism**

It should be noted here that the terms “bilingual” and “bilingualism” are difficult to define. They are used throughout this dissertation, however, because the members of the School’s planning Committee used them. These terms were perceived differently at the time the

School was being established (1950s) than they are perceived today—that is, “the ability to communicate (or the practice of communicating) in both of Canada’s official languages, English and French.”<sup>7</sup>

After World War II, bilingualism was understood as being the separate but equal representation and treatment of Canada’s two official languages, English and French. Jeremy Webber’s book, *The Constitution of Canada: A Contextual Analysis*, argues persuasively that at that point in time there was a growing conflict between English and French Canada with each culture believing that its own self-preservation was connected to “maintaining their language and culture against the demographic and economic weight”<sup>8</sup> of the other.

Betty Lee, in her book, *Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*, addresses this same tension as it was manifested between English and French Canadians in the amateur theatre, noting it existed as early as the 1930s when the DDF began and that DDF organizers felt they had to deal with it.<sup>9</sup> “At one point...” Lee wrote, “the ideal of a fraternally bilingual-bicultural Canada became so overwhelming that the DDF seemed to be making national unification its top priority.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this was also exemplified in the formation of the National Theatre School’s planning committees, as well as in the makeup of the Canadian Theatre Centre committees which oversaw and helped with the School’s establishment. Francophones and anglophones both saw themselves as representatives of an entire culture. This dynamic led to battles over not just language but over the School’s ultimate location and curriculum. Unequal treatment implied cultural favouritism. With the NTS that would not be allowed. In fact, it was the administration of Pierre Trudeau in the 1960s that moved the whole country toward official bilingualism.<sup>11</sup> The official Brief on Bilingualism and Biculturalism reexamined how the English and French cultures could exist together in Canada. It came at a



time when concerns in Quebec regarding the preservation of both the French language and culture needed to be supported.

Though the goal at the NTS was to have separate sections for students—one English-speaking and the other French-speaking—some employees were required to be fluent in both languages, especially the Executive Director of the School. That is, certain positions required a bi-cultural perspective in order to ensure the School remained faithful to being national and bilingual with both the English and French traditions being given equal support and recognition.

### **Michel Saint-Denis**

Finally, it should be noted here that research for this dissertation actually began with a specific focus on the early curriculum as proposed by Michel Saint-Denis. It became clear after examining several archives that Saint-Denis was far more occasional advisor than architect, that Saint-Denis' ideas were ultimately subject to the cultural politics and financial pressures of the time. The fact is he was more deeply involved with the development of the Juilliard School in New York during this period than he was with NTS. This is not to disparage or undervalue Saint-Denis' role but rather to recognize it more clearly. In an important way, this dissertation is correcting the long-held assumptions about the role Saint-Denis played in the establishment of the NTS, while bringing to light other key players in the School's founding.

Once I had clarified Saint-Denis' role, it became necessary for me to shift my focus more to the history and historical pressures that led to the creation of the National Theatre School. And that history, it became clear, had only been hinted at, not yet written. Hopefully this dissertation will fill in some of the gaps in the official record.

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<sup>1</sup> J.E.Middleton, "The Theatre in Canada (1750-1880)," (1914), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 3.

<sup>2</sup> "Indigenous," in the context of the NTS founding, does not refer to the aboriginal culture or traditions. Rather, the term here refers to something "local" within Canada, which at that time (1930s to 1960s) meant plays that reflected Canadian life then and specifically the country's English and French cultures and traditions.

<sup>3</sup> Diana Belshaw and David Fancy, "Mapping New Futures: Solutions for Acting Training in English-Speaking Canada," *Canadian Theatre Review* 160 (2014): 45, accessed August 14, 2015,

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=c69d3f16-2595-4a33-a153-3d059e762a34%40sessionmgr4003&hid=4207>.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Fallis, "Acting Training Institutions: A State of the Nation," *Canadian Theatre Review* 160 (2014): 8, accessed August 14, 2015,

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c69d3f16-2595-4a33-a153-3d059e762a34%40sessionmgr4003&vid=7&hid=4207>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Postlewait, introduction to *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>6</sup> The term "Pro-Tem" was used at the beginning stages of the School's planning process to identify the interim group of individuals who had agreed to participate in the School's establishment, but whose group was not yet recognized as the School's official planning Committee. A permanent Committee called the Pilot Committee was later established in 1959 with the involvement of the professionally-oriented Canadian Theatre Centre.

<sup>7</sup> "Bilingualism," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, last modified February 24, 2015, accessed June 21, 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/bilingualism/>.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy H. A. Webber. *The Constitution of Canada: A Contextual Analysis*, (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015), 212.

<sup>9</sup> Betty Lee, *Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*, (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1973), 161.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Webber. *Reimagining Canada: Language, Culture, Community, and the Canadian Constitution*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 56.

# Dramatis Personae

## *The Major Players Involved in the Creation of the National Theatre School of Canada<sup>1</sup>*

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Colonel Yves Bourassa     | President of the DDF (1959-1960)  |
| Donald Davis              | Actor; Producer; Founder-Director of the Crest Theatre; Chair of the NTS Pro-Tem Committee  |
| James de Beaujeu Domville | Theatrical Producer and Administrator; Commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada; Administrative Director of the NTS        |
| Lady Flora Eaton          | Wife of John Craig Eaton, heir of the Eaton department store; Member of the Board of Directors of Eaton's of Canada; Philanthropist |
| David Gardner             | Actor; Television Drama Producer for the CBC; Vice-President of the CTC; Chair of the NTS Pilot Committee                           |
| Jean Gascon               | Artistic Director of Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde; Producer; Treasurer of the CTC; Executive Director of the NTS                     |
| Gratien Gélinas           | Actor; Playwright; Producer; Artistic Director of La Comédie-Canadienne; President of CTC (1957)                                    |
| Michael Langham           | Artistic Director of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada   |
| Pauline McGibbon          | President of the DDF (1957-1959); Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Pro-tem Committee; Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario (1974-1980)   |
| Mavor Moore               | Actor; Director; President of the CTC (1957); Drama critic of the Toronto Telegram  |
| David Ongley              | President of the DDF (1955); President of the CTC (1959)  |
| Robin Patterson           | Wife of Stratford Festival Founder, Tom Patterson; Public Relations Representative of Stratford's Canadian Players theatre company  |

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Tom Patterson      | Founder of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival;<br>Treasurer of the CTC   |
| Jean Pelletier     | Radio and Television Producer, Quebec City;<br>Secretary to the DDF  |
| Yves Prévost       | Politician; Lawyer; Provincial Secretary of Quebec   |
| Jean-Louis Roux    | Actor; Producer; Secretary General of Le Théâtre<br>du Nouveau Monde, Montreal; Served as Executive<br>Secretary of the CTC  |
| Michel Saint-Denis | Teacher; Director; Producer; Founder, with Jacques<br>Copeau, of the Compagnie des Quinze, France;<br>Founder of London Theatre Studio (1935-1939) and<br>the Old Vic Theatre School (1946-1952), London;<br>Director General of Le Centre de l'Est, Strasbourg<br>(1952-1957); Inspector General of Theatre in<br>France (1959-1969); Cultural Advisor to<br>Rockefeller Foundation for the Juilliard Theatre<br>School, New York City; Artistic Advisor to the<br>NTS planning Committee |
| Roy Stewart        | President of the Central Ontario Drama League<br>(CODL); Second Vice-President of the DDF;<br>Chairman of the Pro-Tem Committee  |
| Powys Thomas       | Actor; Director; Teacher; Graduate of the Old Vic<br>Theatre School, London; Artistic Advisor to the<br>Pilot Committee  |
| Vincent Tovell     | Supervising Producer of Public Affairs, CBC,<br>Toronto  |
| Herbert Whittaker  | Drama Critic of the Toronto <i>Globe and Mail</i> ;<br>Director; Designer  |

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<sup>1</sup> This helpful list of the key players in the creation of the National Theatre School was originally drafted in 1985 in Philip Spensley's "A Brief History of the National Theatre School of Canada" from *l'École: Le Premier Quart de Siècle de l'École Nationale du Théâtre du Canada/ The School: The First Quarter of a Century of the National Theatre School of Canada* by Jean-Louis Roux, Michel Garneau, and Tom Hendry (15-16). It is reprinted here, with a few additions, with permission of the publisher, Éditions international Alain Stanké.

# Chapter One

## Historiography and the National Theatre School's Beginnings

This chapter will look at theatre training in Canada from the early 1900s, when the idea of theatre training was becoming linked to the search for an indigenous drama and performance style in Canada, to the early 1950s with the Massey Commission Report, when it became clear that an important step needed to be taken to establish a professional theatre school combining English and French pedagogical traditions.

Before laying the historical groundwork from which the idea of the NTS emerged, it is necessary to establish how this chapter, and the chapters that follow, will reveal and explore the School's founding as a complex narrative—that is, through a four-part historiographical model suggested by Thomas Postlewait, an approach which identifies and breaks down the various contexts that influence any historical event.

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, Postlewait argues that examining historical events in their complexity requires proper acknowledgement of the many influences which contribute to their structure. He contests what he claims many historical investigations do, which is to place the historical event within a general context and reduce the event's occurrence to a basic “event=context”<sup>1</sup> conditioning.

[T]here will always be some scholars, including a number of theatre historians, who attend almost exclusively to individual events. They describe the details of the events, then quickly conclude their investigation. They often fail to place events in relation to one another, either synchronically or diachronically. At best, the context is evoked as a familiar generalization (e.g. categories of racial, sexual, or national identity, a standard period concept)...[such] scholars...perpetuate a simplified idea of event and context because they are committed to a dualistic model of thinking.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, thinking about an historical event in this “dualistic model of thinking” is to limit and simplify the significance of the event itself and therefore to engage with its documentation inadequately. “We still tend to perceive the ideas of *event* and *context* in dualistic ways,”<sup>3</sup> he notes, emphasizing that the idea of context tends to become problematic because it is applied as a “singular and a total condition that completely controls the event.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, to truly understand the historical event and its influences within a broader history is to acknowledge and deconstruct the event’s interconnected circumstances.

To avoid oversimplification in historical studies, Postlewait suggests a model of historiographical analysis, which

rethink[s] the nature of the binarism. That is, the categorical, the categorical division is part of the problem. By changing the category, we change the organizational procedures and questions. Although each event may have a singular identity (though its contributing parts can be very complex...), there is no reason to define the context in the singular.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than merely looking at the general conditions (i.e. political, social, economic, etc.) surrounding the event, Postlewait breaks down the idea of context into four new categories, revealing, instead of obscuring, the complex realities of the event and its many contributing factors: 1) Event in relation to the World (Event-World), 2) Event in relation to Agents (Event-Agents), 3) Event in relation to Reception (Event-Reception), and 4) Event in relation to Artistic Heritage (Event-Artistic Heritage).<sup>6</sup> Postlewait writes each of these categories as being relative to the event and vice versa, noting that both the event and its different contexts are susceptible to influencing one another, as opposed to the overall context ultimately conditioning the event, which would merely lead us to a deduced cause-and-effect understanding (event = context).

Firstly, the model of Event-World, explains Postlewait, implies that the theatrical or historical event, or in this case the official opening of the National Theatre School of Canada, provides “a perspective *on* and *of* the world.....Every human event articulates and mediates a

series of relations with the world of which it is a part. Our actions and reactions occur as continual negotiations, back and forth, with the surrounding conditions.”<sup>7</sup> The event, then, is a kind of tangible manifestation of the world which helped to create it. The world, according to Postlewait, “is not one thing, but in fact many factors, including the material and immaterial conditions of human existence...[this includes] the economic, political, and geographical orders that operate in human culture.”<sup>8</sup>

In the case of the NTS, the historical “world” articulated at the time the idea of a national theatre school was emerging was that of a Canadian theatre (in the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth century) without government funding, a theatre which was colonial in its theatrical traditions, and which depended heavily on Britain, France, and the United States for training. Indeed, as the planning of the NTS progressed, so did numerous socio-political, cultural, and economic circumstances of the time. In this sense, the historical context from which the NTS was established was in constant motion, an element important to consider throughout this entire historiographical study.

Secondly, the category Event-Agents must be considered. “These people who plan, organize, and realize the event,” Postlewait notes, “are all agents.... author and authoring, both actual and implied, both direct and indirect.”<sup>9</sup> The features of the event are shaped by the decisions, the purposes and aims, of the agents involved in its creation. The features of the NTS at the time of its opening clearly reflect those myriad ideas, intentions, and even conflicts both individually and organizationally.

Thirdly, a significant part of the meaning of the event comes from the ways in which it is received and understood by the people who engage with it (Event-Reception).<sup>10</sup> This includes “the conditions of perceptions and evaluation, the processes of comprehension by various

people—their horizon of expectations and their methods of interpreting (and misinterpreting) the event at the time.”<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in the case of the NTS, its receptions from teachers, students, press, supporters, governments, and scholars all had to be considered here since they do not necessarily reveal a singular view of the School’s founding. Clearly, there is no one moment of the NTS story which can be examined without linking it to other elements.

The reception may entail both those who attend the event and the community factors and conditions (e.g. governmental powers, the law, the beliefs and values of the society, the aesthetic tastes and expectations of the era)...Sometimes the manner of reception influences the event, which undergoes adaptation, even transformation.<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, every event is influenced by its heritage or cultural context and specifically in the case of an event relating to the arts, its artistic heritage (Event-Artistic Heritage).

The idea of *artistic heritage* includes the artistic traditions, conventions, norms, and codes of not only drama and theatre but all of the arts. Every artistic event has a relation to the artistic tradition or heritage in which it operates, to which it refers, and out of which it shapes its own separate identity.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the NTS opening was not what Postlewait might call an “artistic event” (unlike a theatre performance), yet it was a performance of sorts which influenced significantly future artistic events in the Canadian theatre. The NTS curriculum at the time of its opening revealed two separate, yet congruent, curriculums (one for the English Section and one for the French Section) operating under one roof, and therefore it also revealed much about the objectives of the School in relation to the emerging professional Canadian theatre. The dual curriculum was composed by English and French theatrical traditions suggested mostly by Michel Saint-Denis and would be taught for an extended period of time by individuals who trained in those traditions. That is, classes and productions would present work influenced by both the English and French artistic traditions. A key purpose of the School was for those cultural traditions to inform one another so to eventually create a new combined artistic heritage, unique to Canada. “All artistic works,”



Postlewait explains, “no matter how innovative they may be, exist in relation to an artistic heritage of conventions and models. The voices of the ancestors echo in the world, even when an artist may reject or trash traditions.”<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, in order to understand the structure, objectives, and purpose of the National Theatre School of Canada at the time of its opening, and its reception within a broader Canadian theatre context, it is necessary to deconstruct such events which contribute to the formation of its establishment. Postlewait’s four-part model enables this deconstruction and was therefore important to this historiographical study in order to provide the objective background necessary for understanding Roux’s, Garneau’s, and Hendry’s *l’École/The School*, and other perspectives toward the NTS. It is also important to acknowledge that while each chapter might be focused on a particular part of Postlewait’s model, the identified categories—World, Agents, Reception, and Artistic Heritage—inevitably connect with one another throughout. That is, “the event is situated in relation to each of the four contributing factors. It is also in tension with each of them, a series of dialogues and exchanges that the historian may chart.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Observations and Revelations**

In many works which address the founding of the National Theatre School of Canada, the narrative of the School’s origins is often brief and tends to begin with the formation of the Pro-Tem Committee in 1958, or, more commonly, just a few years before. In fact, early Committee members Pauline McGibbon and David Gardner mark the beginning of the School’s founding as 1952, the year when it was hoped that Michel Saint-Denis, who had just finished adjudicating the Dominion Drama Festival Finals in Saint John, New Brunswick, would agree to stay in the country to help create a national training school.<sup>16</sup>

In their privately-circulated document, “A Step by Step History of the Founding of a Canadian School of Dramatic Art,” McGibbon and Gardner start by referencing Saint-Denis, implying that his time in Canada in 1952 sparked interest in the idea of a theatre school.

Partial as he was to the theatre of Canada and to the scheme proposed, M. Saint-Denis was also the recipient of another offer from the Ministry of Fine Arts in his native France, the establishment and directorship of a national theatre centre in Strasbourg, Le Centre de L’Est. M. Saint-Denis accepted this offer in the belief that it would be probably the final and climactic event of his career. The thought of a theatre school in Canada did not immediately die, however, and others were considered to implement the idea. However, it became clear that the committee could not replace Michel Saint-Denis in their thinking. From 1952-1957 the idea of a National Theatre School in Canada reflecting the principles of Michel Saint-Denis, lay dormant.<sup>17</sup>

Philip Spensley, in *l’École: Le Premier Quart de Siècle de l’École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada/ The School: The First Quarter of a Century of the National Theatre School of Canada*, provided a similar dating of the School.

Although the dream had floated in many people’s minds since the end of World War II, it was in 1952 that the idea of a professional theatre school of the highest standard, serving Canadians from coast to coast and bringing together both French and English-speaking students under one roof, made its first real breakthrough. World renowned director and teacher, Michel Saint-Denis, was that month of May serving as Finals’ adjudicator for the Dominion Drama Festival....<sup>18</sup>

Other scholars including Jane Baldwin, George Berberich, and Charles L. Railsback situate the founding of the NTS in a more general post-war context when the Canadian theatre scene was experiencing a time of change and development. Clearly, Saint-Denis’ presence in Canada at this time inspired further action toward the establishment of a national theatre school in Canada, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that 1952 was, in fact, the formal beginning of the planning of such a school. Yet the idea of professional theatre training in Canada existed much earlier and should be taken into account when examining the role of the NTS in the development of the Canadian theatre. A look farther back into how and why the idea of a theatre school was

conceived becomes important to help explain why such a high level school was first proposed and to suggest additional reasons for why and how NTS would emerge.

Don Rubin's *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings* compiles what J.L. Granatstein—one of Canada's foremost historians—noted as an "extraordinary collection of articles on the history of theatre in Canada,"<sup>19</sup> discussing the state of the Canadian theatre as early as the mid-eighteenth century by those who witnessed it. In his "Forward," Granatstein describes the collection of essays as a way to see "the roots of Canadian theatre,"<sup>20</sup> and specifically notes that one recurring issue was that aspiring actors had to "leave Canada to train and work."<sup>21</sup>

Rubin's collection of essays begins with J.E. Middleton's "The Theatre in Canada (1750-1880)," in which the author reflects on Garrison Theatre, describing it as "infant drama [that] was nurtured on pipe-clay and sentr[ies] cradled in a sentry-box."<sup>22</sup> He specifically notes how the theatre was produced by military troupes composed of amateur male performers, but also points out visits by British and American touring companies. What was missing, Middleton argued, was a theatre more representative of Canada itself, performed by trained artists:

[o]nly the playing of trained professional actors and actresses ever approaches the artistic and interests of the general public... Men and women who are willing to pay to witness amateur performances may be moved by sympathy, or social considerations, ennui, or even despair: seldom are they clamorous to enter because of the fineness of the acting.... We do not look for supreme attainment in the young women who decorate china for amusement. We go to the man who has lived with his technique for a lifetime, whose colour-box is not a toy, but a means of self-expression.<sup>23</sup>

Even at this early point, Middleton saw in Canada the need for a theatrical identity and a Canadian-trained actor.

...[O]f course there was a vast gulf between a professional actor and a gentleman amateur.... One might give a list of Canadian-born players who have attained

distinction in the profession, but nearly all of them had their training in the United States and are all intents American rather than Canadian actors.<sup>24</sup>

In 1902, Madame Joséphine Dandurand, president of the Committee for the Promotion of Industrial and Fine Arts in Canada, echoed this in a report to the National Council of Women, saying that “Canada must maintain its ‘rank among civilized nations’ by ensuring that talented people did not leave the country for lack of encouragement and that they were not overlooked in the first place because cultural education was ‘left to chance and privilege.’”<sup>25</sup>

Through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, theatre activities—amateur for the most part—continued to emerge across the country with local and even semi-professional<sup>26</sup> companies appearing in Montreal. In the early part of the twentieth century, drama classes were begun at the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression in Toronto. The school included students such as Dorothy Chilcott and Dora Mavor Moore, the mothers of two of the NTS Pro-Tem Committee members—Donald Davis and Mavor Moore. Actress Amelia Hall was herself trained in the 1910s at the Hamilton Conservatory of Music under the instruction of Clara Salisbury Baker with whom she studied poetry, voice, diction, and the classics. But these modest efforts in the major cities were all there were being offered in Canada in terms of training for the theatre.

As far back as 1911, theatre critic Bernard K. Sandwell wrote an article for *The Canadian Magazine*, “The Annexation of Our Stage,” which told of his conversation with a Toronto girl hoping to pursue a theatrical career in Canada.<sup>27</sup>

‘Do you know’, she said, ‘that if it were possible to pursue a theatrical career here in Canada, in my own country, I would enter upon it tomorrow? As things are, the chief cause of my hesitation is the fact that I must go to a foreign country in order even to get an engagement, that I must play most, if not all, of my time in that foreign country; that I must make New York my headquarters, go the rounds of the New York managers, rehearse in New York, act the plays that New York wants, and by the time I get anywhere in my profession everybody, myself included, will have forgotten that I ever was a Canadian.’<sup>28</sup>

In response, Sandwell pointed out that had the girl worked in

any other art known to humanity, she could have practiced it to her heart's content in Toronto, and if she were clever enough she could have made a good living at it, and could have remained with her own people all her life. Doubtless she would have had to study abroad; but that does not denationalize one. As painter, as writer, as musician, as sculptor, as poet, she could have held an honoured place in the community and helped to build up the culture of the nation to which she belonged.<sup>29</sup>

Why, he asks, were aspiring Canadian actors and actresses put into such a position?

Only as an actress was she obliged to expatriate herself. The nearest she could have come to that in Canada was the poor and unsatisfactory and half-way art of 'recitation'. And by the way, there are a lot of clever Canadian girls wasting their time on this infantile pursuit and announcing to bored audiences that 'curfew shall not ring tonight', who would be giving good impersonations in the legitimate drama if the way thereto did not lie beyond their means, beyond their courage, beyond the limits of their country and the helping hands of their friends.<sup>30</sup>

Sandwell argued that more attention needed to be paid to improving the conditions of the Canadian theatre if it was to grow and flourish. As journalist and theatre critic Arthur Beverly Baxter put it in his 1916 *Maclean's* article, "The Birth of the National Theatre," "Canada must seek national expression through the arts or her travail will have been in vain."<sup>31</sup>

In order to achieve national expression, Baxter emphasized—in his discussion of the Drama League of Ottawa and the establishment of a Canadian national theatre—there was a need to support an indigenous drama created by Canadian "amateurs," defined by the author as those "who follow the theatre for the love of it, not for the remuneration."<sup>32</sup> One such potential dramatist for Canada was populist writer Robert Service, whom Baxter referred to as "the best prospect for a real creator of drama," but only "if he could acquire the stage technique..."<sup>33</sup> "[P]laywriting requires technique," Baxter wrote, "a delicate, elusive mastery of action, suspense and dramatic values. It is not easy to acquire."<sup>34</sup> It was hoped that at least the new theatre at the Victoria Memorial Museum (called grandly the Canadian National Theatre) would suffice in educating through experience not only the public taste toward higher, more professional

standards, but specifically the artists who might lead the way: “perhaps with the aid of the Canadian National Theatre some of them may become masters of the drama.”<sup>35</sup> Still, could one acquire technical knowledge without a school and could this lead to the development of a real national theatre and drama?

In 1919, stage actor and writer Harcourt Farmer commented in his article, “Play-writing In Canada,” on the Canadian theatre’s inability to become recognized as a legitimate craft along with other artistic forms, stating,

[m]usic and painting, poetry and general literature, all occupy places of definite social permanence and artistic importance here. They are recognized as necessary vital factors in the country’s developments. As such, these branches of expression are receiving earnest attention, expert and otherwise, from men and women who really have the national welfare at heart. There are Canadian composers and interpreters, Canadian painters and sculptors, Canadian poets and Canadian authors.<sup>36</sup>

He then asked, “Where are the Canadian playwrights?”<sup>37</sup> Farmer believed that Canada needed its own dramatists as well as its own interpreters and firmly attributed specific characteristics to the Canadian playwright:

...I don’t mean persons of Canadian descent, who, migrating to New York or London, have written popular successes. Any competent literary workman can do this, irrespective of nationality. The result is simply a commercial product, not in the least fashion typical of the author’s own country. I mean persons of Canadian descent, or adoption, who have written plays the subject-matter of which deals with some intrinsic part of Canadian life, past or present; and whose plays are directly artistic representations of Canadian life, or interpretations of Canadian temperament.<sup>38</sup>

While Farmer felt that Canada had potential to develop its theatre into something uniquely “Canadian,” as well as professional, he believed that what was needed in order for this development to take place was education, both in theory and in practice:

There is an obvious line of demarcation between the dramatist and the historian. It is necessary to recall this fact because there are several Canadians who have written some very interesting historical chronicles; but, in the compositions of this character that I have been enabled to glance at, there has been a sorry absence of

dramatic technique. So that, for the purposes of present discussion, we may consider that we have two groups of Canadian playwrights: the people who are versed in Canadian history and unskilled in dramatic construction, and the people who are expert playwrights while being ignorant of Canadian history. The class to which Canadian Letters must look for the provision and development of the true Canadian drama will have to be composed of the blended best of the other classes.<sup>39</sup>

Farmer suggested that the establishment of a school would teach and train in a Canadian way.

...[M]ay it be mildly suggested that it is not wholly necessary to depend on New York and Boston for advice in the constructional development of the drama in Canada. Occasional expert help we must have. But let it be complementary to our own work. It is one thing to discuss plays and playwriting and another thing to write plays and stage them....A co-operation between the two branches would work wonders, provided there was a ready agreement that all those concerned would work toward the common objective—our own plays in our own theatres.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed—because of the First World War—it would still be decades until Canada would see Farmer’s statement fully realized. Nevertheless, there was a gradual growth of theatrical activity and interest by the 1920s. The amateur theatre pressed on, and “held the stage until Canada was ready for professional theatre. In the early post-war years, the roads of amateur and professional theatre were often intertwined and the distinctions between them unclear.”<sup>41</sup>

In 1922, Vincent Massey—a future native-born Governor General of Canada—wrote in “The Prospects of a Canadian Drama” that “[i]t is wiser to remember that without a wide process of education, art will not be a vendible commodity, save to a few, and that progress will only be gained by our own active concern with the process of education.”<sup>42</sup> Like many others, Massey critiqued the existing Canadian theatre’s dependency on international product and reconfirmed his belief in a national drama in order for the country to see cultural growth through the theatre. He urged a move away from the commercialism of touring Broadway shows or the playing of dramatic works by foreign playwrights. Massey argued, in fact, that an autonomously Canadian drama and style could arise through improving the cultural environment generally. “If plays are essential to the fortunes of a theatre,” Massey wrote, “the converse of the axiom is equally true.

The drama cannot flourish apart from the theatre anymore than religion can survive divorced from a church. By a theatre I mean, of course, something more than the material equipment of stage and auditorium. I mean as well the company of actors and craftsmen that make the modern theatre community, just as a church is composed of a body of believers and is not merely a fabric of wood and stone.<sup>43</sup>

Massey was particularly inspired by the Irish theatre of the time, with its interest in playwrights, the emergence of the Abbey Theatre, and the formation of a national style. Ireland was birthing playwrights, said Massey, because their plays were being produced.

[M]en and women cannot be expected to write plays unless they have some hope of seeing them acted.... the playwright can hardly be expected to produce good plays unless he has had some actual experience of stagecraft. The last place to gain this experience is from the stalls, because all the devices of playwright and stage manager, in the nature of things are calculated not to *inform*, but to *deceive* the auditor. An apprenticeship ‘behind stage’ – at any work (even that of shifting scenery might be a useful avenue to knowledge because it leaves the mind free to think) is of value to the playwright’s technique.<sup>44</sup>

To Massey, playwriting was not a pursuit just of talent, but of training as well, learning the “rigid” “mechanical requirements,” which, in turn, could lead to a popular, yet respected repertory theatre and “give to the drama the freedom which commercialism denies it.”<sup>45</sup>

Massey acknowledged the important intermediary role of the amateur theatre movement in Canada at the time, and he doubted that a viable commercial theatre could emerge because of Canada’s small population base. That is to say, while the idea of a national theatre was motivating theatre communities in various cities, financial instability—an issue which would haunt the founding Committee of the NTS—was almost always an issue: how to obtain the finances necessary for cultural support. “Little esoteric groups of amateurs removed from any serious financial responsibility to their clientele, will easily fall prey to some prevailing fad, and will seek to impose it on their audience.”<sup>46</sup> “But failing such a theatre,” Massey asked, “what can we expect to serve as the workshop for the playwright, to give him his experience and the vehicle



for his ideas? Will the amateur dramatic movements now flourishing in half a dozen of our cities serve the purpose?”<sup>47</sup>

He returned again and again to the plays and to “a system of training” which could “aid the development of playwrights?”<sup>48</sup>

Technical training of all kinds has become a fetish on this continent. We too often forget that the only sound foundation of any professional career is an education in the humanities. Once the mind has been liberally endowed and thoroughly trained, then the formulae, the rules of thumb, the tricks of the trade, whether it be law, journalism, or the theatre, can be acquired without the danger that they be mistaken for genuine principles.<sup>49</sup>

Massey realized that to successfully develop Canadian artists to a professional level, there must be core training:

...[A]rt must wait for education; it is the duty of art to educate, to create its own public.... [I]f our dramatists are both good Canadians and good artists their plays will have in them the essence of Canada, and will embody the spirit of the country, whatever that may be, and Canada will be the richer for them.<sup>50</sup>

Also critical of the nation’s amateur theatre at the time was Canadian playwright (and teacher) Herman Voaden, a future member of the NTS Pro-Tem Committee. In a 1929 article for the *Globe and Mail* called “What is Wrong with the Canadian Theatre?” Voaden noted numerous deficiencies in the Canadian theatre and identified points of progress. An early graduate himself of the Yale School of Drama, Voaden compared Canadian theatre in the 1920s with professional theatre in Europe and America, pointing out that Canada ultimately needed its own playwrights and style if it was to become a distinct cultural entity. He was particularly disappointed in the lack of performance and writing technique he saw in Canada, noting that a professionally-oriented theatre school was critical to the growth of theatre quality. “It is unfortunate that there is no progressive school of the drama in Canada to afford training for our leaders in the principles of technique of the new stagecraft.”<sup>51</sup> He added that with the growing popularity of radio and

cinema there was indeed a greater demand for well-trained actors and theatre practitioners in the country.

## **Groups, Troupes, and Little Schools**

By the 1920s and 1930s, theatre artists began to train in extra-curricular university classes and semi-professional companies. Theatre people including Roy Mitchell, Robert Gill, Pierre Lefèvre, John Blatchly, and even Herbert Whittaker worked with these groups. “[G]ood directors,” Whittaker stated, were what “kept it [the quality of the work] up to standard.”<sup>52</sup>

At the University of Toronto, Hart House (a gift of the Massey family) offered space for students not only to experiment, but to learn. According to Betty Lee, the theatre at Hart House (Hart House Theatre) was a place “where members may discover the true education that is to be found in good fellowship.”<sup>53</sup> Although it was not until after the War when Hart House made itself more available to university theatre groups, note Ross Stuart and Ann Stuart, it “had great influence on the little theatre movement in Canada...”<sup>54</sup> Playwright Merrill Denison wrote that “as a Canadian institution it [Hart House Theatre] has exerted stimulating influence on...community theatres throughout the country.”<sup>55</sup> Hart House “has pointed the road,” Denison noted, providing an operational theatre which offered groups of artists to “crystalize and give a definite form to their aspirations,” and in “observing the work of the group of people connected with the theatre, from one production to another, one feels that it [Hart House Theatre] is of great value as a training school for acting.”<sup>56</sup> Dora Mavor Moore acknowledged that the Hart House Players in the 1930s “absorbed a really wonderful group of people that were quite of professional standing” and had “professional coaching.”<sup>57</sup>

## The West and the Prairies

On the west coast, two teachers were trying to establish theatre schools—Carroll Aikins and Llewellyn Bullock-Webster. In 1920 in the Okanagan area of British Columbia, Aikins founded the Home Theatre and with it a school, which taught and demonstrated technical precision in acting and production.<sup>58</sup> According to James Hoffman in his article “Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre,” Aikins’ school was well-anticipated by the community:

Mr. Carroll Aikins...has financed and built on his property, one of the coziest, most modern, and up-to-the-minute theatres it is conceivable to devise, and all without the usual blare of trumpet and newspaper advertising that accommodates enterprises of much less importance than that in which Mr. Aikins is engaged. He built the theatre primarily for the education and training of Canadian actors...It is the intention of Mr. Aikins to offer the public the higher class productions of the legitimate stage and the residents of the Southern Okanagan will be fortunate in this respect.<sup>59</sup>

Aikins believed that the school could develop the theatre in Canada by inspiring original works and training actors. At the school’s opening, Aikins stated,

we have built this theatre for the giving of Canadian plays by Canadian actors. We hope that it will be used by the young actor as a training-ground for his abilities, and by the young poet as a testing-ground for his work; and we have great pleasure in offering it to them, for the service of beauty and for a true expression of the Canadian spirit.<sup>60</sup>

According to Hoffman, Aikins recruited students and promoted his school by travelling to various urban centres, speaking to drama clubs, and writing magazine articles. In the first summer, only six students arrived, one of which was Muriel Evans who left the University of British Columbia after her first year to study at the Home Theatre, “a place to ‘learn acting,’” as she put it.<sup>61</sup> Every aspect of theatre was studied there and both Carroll and his wife Katherine taught classes in acting, voice, mime, set, props, and lighting.<sup>62</sup> Dorothy Somerset studied acting with Aikins in Vancouver and said he was “a fine teacher of acting.”<sup>63</sup> “As for a regular curriculum though,” Hoffman noted,

it was... 'a hit and miss affair.' Aikins, a man of ideals and dreams, was not concerned with organization; he taught whatever happened to strike him.... Aikins brought a great variety of material, poems, play excerpts, prose readings and the like, for use in the classes. There is little doubt that he was a good, if maddeningly disorganized, teacher.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, it was not just the teacher and his or her expertise that brought a school its successful receptions, but also the organization of a set curriculum clearly mattered as well. Although Aikins' theatre and school closed in 1924, theatre training in B.C. continued.

In 1921, Welsh-born Llewellyn Bullock-Webster opened his own theatre school in Victoria, which ran for 11 years. With an extensive background in British theatre, Bullock-Webster's school was dedicated to technical precision in voice and speech. As James Hoffman describes him,

Bullock-Webster was obviously the right man for British Victoria. Emphatically English, with a forceful, cultured mien, a military and organizational background, and impressive London theatre credits, he had no trouble gaining acceptance in a town that was more and more measuring its persona in the rhythms of graceful Olde England. It is to Bullock-Webster's credit that, along with offering so strong a theatrical leadership locally, he was able to provide at least some vision that looked outward to the rest of Canada, and to an extent, the world.<sup>65</sup>

Bullock-Webster's first project was the BC College of Elocution (BCCE), which was also dedicated to producing large populist musicals, though it also included poems and plays on its producing schedule. Located in a newly-renovated building on Fort Street, the centre of the business district, the school consisted of a studio furnished with the necessities of a small, yet functional auditorium and backstage.

In its first year of operation, BCCE attracted a broad following, teaching voice and speech as it related to literature, drama, and public speaking. "The school," said a 1922 Prospectus, "provides expert professional training in the principles of stage deportment, the technique of acting, and the development of physical and mental equilibrium."<sup>66</sup> According to Hoffman, in 1929 Bullock-Webster described the approach of the school as one which

emphasized the use of drama education not only to develop the professional theatre, but also to help with social and personal success:

The objects of the school are manifold. There are groups of businessmen who come to develop their natural gifts of public-speaking.... Ladies of social position come to gain self-confidence, or to read aloud. Children, in the main, come to correct the speech defects which are apt to develop during school years. Many girls of teen age find that dramatic work helps them to overcome self-consciousness, embarrassment and general nervousness. The bigger boys are usually interested in public-speaking. And amongst all these are people with dramatic talent, who enjoy the experience of rehearsals on professional lines.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, the drama school was not just for developing the actor, but the individual as well.

Within the first few years, the school became an important part of the province's cultural development. On average, there were approximately 65 students each year ranging from children to aspiring adult actors, giving it a rather unusual, yet pervasive reputation. Bullock-Webster also made it a priority to bring his students visiting professionals from all over the world, including the director of the Royal College of Music in London, Sir Hugh Allen, who spoke about modern music, and Thelma Rea, from the Barry Jackson Company in the U.K., who talked about "A Stage Career." Also visiting were touring performers who spoke of their careers and gave dramatic readings. Bullock-Webster himself offered regular lectures and readings.

Clearly, Bullock-Webster's British influence and international knowledge offered insights not otherwise available in most Canadian cities. He was

keen on gesture, voice, timing and interpretation. He stressed the effective use of hands - favouring a strong use of mime to convey poetry, the careful handling of diction, the appropriate timing of gesture to the word, and the thoroughly understood meaning of a work - in which he was open to the student's contribution as long as it was not 'too far off.' Intense, yet patient, he impressed people as effective, likeable, and very English.<sup>68</sup>

Bullock-Webster's approach to speech was strongly rooted in the British idea of "correct speech....a speech ideal that was British."<sup>69</sup> To him, it was the duty of teachers "to analyze and understand the composition and then find out how to conjure up in the minds of the listeners a

vivid picture which shall reveal and if possible enhance the full beauty of the author's meaning."<sup>70</sup> Bullock-Webster called his school "young," employing "...in addition to the spoken word, beauty of tone, beauty of line, and of movement.... all movement of voice or body that definitely tends to aid in producing an atmosphere conducive to the appreciation of the author's message."<sup>71</sup> Bullock-Webster, as Hoffman describes him, was "an effective teacher of dramatics with most success in developing the person rather than training the actor, more typically in the role of coach than in that of stage director..."<sup>72</sup>

Although born in the U.K., Bullock-Webster believed

...that the time is not far distant when Canada will have a National Drama, just as she is now developing a National Literature and School of Painting, the school's policy has always been to encourage the development of talent in those whose work may ultimately be destined to bring credit to the Canadian stage."<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, the school succumbed to the Depression in 1932, though Bullock-Webster's role in Canada as a teacher of dramatic expression continued on. He eventually became a leader in the B.C. Ministry of Education organizing and making accessible drama workshops and festivals which he believed would help the Canadian theatre to grow and flourish.

According to Ross Stuart in *The History of Prairie Theatre*, Western Canada generally in the early 1930s was leading the nation in the development of such educational theatre programs. More specifically, Stuart notes that the growth of theatre education at that time in the prairies can be attributed to the initial summer courses offered at the Banff School of Fine Arts, which "really launched the educational theatre movement in Western Canada."<sup>74</sup> According to Stuart, both students and teachers were inspired to continue the training:

University courses and eventually degree programs evolved in response to the demand for comparable training in the winter months. Drama departments graduated new teachers who pressed for more school courses in drama. The best students in these classes would go to Banff and then, after graduation, to the universities. Many ultimately returned to the schools as teachers, continuing the cycle.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, there were schools teaching elocution and acting in the western region, but there was no lasting institution offering consistent professional theatre training at the time. But this would change in 1933 with the vision of E.A. Corbett of the University of Alberta and the leadership of Elizabeth Sterling Haynes,<sup>76</sup> who established and ran the Banff School of Fine Arts.

Corbett's original plan was to create an "experimental school in the arts related to the theatre."<sup>77</sup> The aim, according to Stuart, was to attract community drama leaders with the hope that they would return to their own theatre groups and teach what they learned, spreading the knowledge while also promoting the school. For the first summer of the school's existence, it was expected that only 40 students would register, but a total of 130 students paid the \$1 fee to attend. The financial support of the Carnegie Foundation in the United States provided much of the funding for the first five years, particularly so Haynes could teach at the school and "provide the theatrical acumen necessary to make the school a success."<sup>78</sup>

In fact, the Carnegie Foundation, which was supposed to end its funding in 1936, continued to offer support because of Haynes, providing the school with a \$10,000 annual grant until 1938. According to Stuart, numerous people Haynes met in her travels across the province as a teacher, adjudicator, and mentor "followed her to the Banff School."<sup>79</sup> Prairie playwright Elsie Park Gowan called Haynes "the guiding spirit of the Banff School... [a] friend, counselor and guide [whose] enthusiasm, sympathy, and power as a director open[ed] new worlds to the students of theatre."<sup>80</sup>

For its very first session, the school's facilities were minimal. Students had to find their own accommodations, but fortunately classrooms were provided by the local school board. The seventeen plays rehearsed that summer were performed in Bretton Hall, which needed and received the generous maintenance help of community members. The first year though was a

success, and the following two summers drew more than double the students who “came from all over the province and outside Alberta.”<sup>81</sup> Registration costs increased to \$10 and Roy Mitchell<sup>82</sup> and his wife Jocelyn Taylor visited and offered their expertise. According to Stuart, the mornings consisted of “classes in dramatic literature, voice, acting, eurythmics, technical theatre, make-up, and directing. Afternoons were devoted to rehearsing and to practical work in playwriting and stagecraft.”<sup>83</sup> The senior students worked with the junior students and final performances were open to the public.

By 1938, the school’s esteemed reputation attracted teachers including Emrys Jones, who would later help to establish the UNESCO-affiliated Canadian Theatre Centre, former Moscow Art Theatre member Alexander Koiransky, and Dr. Frederick Koch of the University of North Carolina, who inspired the writing program.<sup>84</sup>

At this time, however, the school’s funding had to start coming from elsewhere since the grant from Carnegie was expiring. Donald Cameron, an English-born Canadian Senator, academic, and teacher worked closely with Corbett to get support from other organizations, which they managed to do by forming a relationship with the Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary. According to Stuart, this resulted in the school’s official name—the Banff School of Fine Arts—which eventually turned it into a million-dollar a year operation.

Donald Cameron himself became a major figure in the development of theatre education in the west. By the 1940s, he had become director of the Banff School, and gave both his and the school’s support in the establishment of the Western Theatre Conference, or, as Stuart calls it, “a valuable prairie theatre service organization.”<sup>85</sup>

Founded in 1943 and hosted by Cameron, representatives of universities and drama heads from the Departments of Education in the four western provinces participated in the Conference.



It was hoped that through such an organization the value of theatre education would be implemented and legitimized as accredited opportunities. “The organization’s objectives were to promote the values of dramatic training and to design and implement credit courses in theatre in all teacher-training institutions and universities.”<sup>86</sup> It was also hoped that the Conference would lead to the creation of new Canadian works. In her 1948 report, Dorothy Somerset, who was teaching drama at the University of British Columbia, noted that

The Conference devoted its energies to encouraging the development of theatre in the west... By bringing together the workers in the theatre from all four western provinces, it enabled them to become better acquainted with each other, to form a bond of fellowship. It permitted them to exchange information and discuss mutual problems—to the advantage of all four provinces.<sup>87</sup>

By 1950, there was an increase in credit courses in drama and drama programs in prairie schools and universities, and new works were being produced by educational and community theatres. As Stuart put it, “the Conference had indeed helped to increase the importance of theatre in the prairies through its publications, contests, meetings, and programs.”<sup>88</sup> There was an issue, however, which would lead to the disbandment of the Conference that same year. While the Banff School and the Conference were developing, the Dominion Drama Festival was flourishing with the similar aim of rousing interest in the theatre and theatre training, except the latter was a national endeavour promoting development in the whole country. Stuart acknowledged that “the country now needed a Canadian Theatre Conference because national goals had become more important than regional ones.”<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, several other schools were forming in the prairies in response to the emergence of theatre education in the west. In 1959, the Alberta government’s Culture and Recreation Branch set up and sponsored a week-long summer course led by theatre director and teacher Robert Gill and Frank Holroyd of the University of Saskatchewan. “The results,” Stuart

notes, “clearly proved that there was a need for a shorter, more intensive (and cheaper) alternative to Banff.”<sup>90</sup> In Drumheller, Southern Alberta, and Qu’Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan, other smaller schools were established which provided general introductory programs specifically designed for those without any theatre background, while offering short, but intensive and professional-level training for experienced students.

As well, the University of Manitoba began offering a theatre degree.<sup>91</sup>

Central Canadian universities (and consequently the school systems...adhered much longer to the traditional English practice of acknowledging dramatics as an extracurricular activity. Educational theatre in the prairie provinces provided young people with instruction, stimulation, organization, and the opportunities to produce plays.”<sup>92</sup>

In addition, a Student Union Glee Club and a University Dramatic Society were formed, the latter helping to produce future theatre professionals such as administrator and playwright Tom Hendry and actor Douglas Rain.

Hungarian-born theatre director John Hirsch—who would later teach at the NTS and hire some of the School’s first graduates such as Martha Henry and Heath Lamberts—worked closely with Tom Hendry to establish the Manitoba Theatre Centre, a regional theatre born in 1958 out of their amateur and semi-professional theatre groups, Winnipeg Little Theatre and Theatre 77. Hirsch strongly believed that the Canadian theatre, and specifically Winnipeg, needed to move toward professionalism, not only through higher level productions, but also through a theatre school.<sup>93</sup> In fact, the MTC was promoted as a place of learning. Fraidie Martz and Andrew Wilson note in *A Fiery Soul: the Life and Theatrical Times of John Hirsch* that MTC was originally created to present amateur and professional theatre but that Hirsch pushed for more of the latter, which he emphasized could be achieved through theatre training. He “argued that a theatre school would be a valuable addition to Winnipeg, both to train young actors and to

educate the local audience.”<sup>94</sup> According to Martz and Wilson, however, the school was used more for building an audience than anything else.<sup>95</sup>

As well, Emrys Jones founded the Department of Drama at the University of Saskatchewan. “From 1937-1942, as part of his responsibilities as drama instructor for the School of Education, he conducted summer classes in Edmonton for teachers who wanted to offer theatre courses.”<sup>96</sup> In 1946, Jones created another Drama Department in Saskatoon, which

grew rapidly because schools needed teachers and many community theatre members wanted training. Students welcomed the opportunity to study practical theatre. Over eight hundred of them took theatre courses in the first ten years alone. The University of Saskatchewan’s exciting, innovative approach to educational theatre was copied by other prairie universities.<sup>97</sup>

At Regina College, a variety of aspects of theatre were taught including playwriting, modern drama, voice and speech. As Stuart explains, “their programs combined technical training in acting, directing, and production with the study of dramatic literature and theory and theatre history.”<sup>98</sup> The University of Alberta too offered numerous courses for both B.A. and B.Ed. students including acting, speech, and production. Education students would specifically receive credits “to teach the recently instituted high school courses in drama.”<sup>99</sup>

The prairies were particularly influential in initiating the teaching of drama to students in primary and secondary schools in the 1930s. “The prairie provinces,” Stuart notes, “recognized the value of credit courses in drama in the school system years before the rest of Canada. Alberta has the longest history of curricular dramatics...”<sup>100</sup> The courses encouraged “self-development, imagination, and awareness, but also provided basic training in theatre techniques.”<sup>101</sup> The Women’s Research Council later published a column called “Inspiration Found in School Drama Courses” which justified Alberta’s approach to teaching and accrediting drama courses, stating,

The inclusion of a course in dramatics in schools has been made in response to a growing awareness of the theatre, which, with music, literature and art, form to a large extent the cultural basis of modern life. The latter subjects have long been

an essential part of the curriculum.... From the point of view of the student, the course opens new horizons of the mind, and his eagerness and pleasure, his inventiveness and industry are a gratification to any teacher.<sup>102</sup>

## Quebec

In Montreal, aspects of theatre training had begun in the late 1920s when Martha Allan founded the Montreal Repertory Theatre (MRT). Allan, a bilingual anglophone, had been involved in the amateur theatre since she was a child, and after studying in Paris and working in the United States, she returned to Montreal to begin her own company. Both English and French plays were performed by the MRT based at McGill University. Her group (which later included Christopher Plummer) consisted of bilingual actors and was unique for encouraging exchanges between the English and French communities. In an important way, Allan set a precedent for what would later become a key goal of the NTS—bilingualism.

The MRT generally showcased young talent and new, somewhat experimental works. Allan also held playwriting contests to inspire the creation of original Canadian works. The most well-known of these was *Eros at Breakfast* by Robertson Davies. In 1933, the MRT took the major step of adding in a school. There, Allan offered classes in acting, directing, stagecraft, and make-up. With the advent of the Second World War, however, the group essentially closed down (though a small group called the Tin Hats continued as part of the Red Cross).

After the war, MRT reopened (Allan had died in the interim) under the direction of Filmore and Marjorie Sadler, offering classes in acting, writing, and radio announcing. In 1952, the company experienced a fire at its Guy Street Playhouse and 23 years worth of props, costumes, and scenery went up in flames along with the theatre. Lost as well were books on theatrical costuming, innumerable programs, and century-old autographed portraits.

The Sadlers had earlier operated the Brae Manor Playhouse on Brome Lake in the Eastern Townships. Starting in 1936, they offered a show a week in the Lakeview Hotel. Brae Manor also offered classes in acting, voice, diction, and movement, as well as dance and make-up. The school's most active years were 1946-1950 when the young actress Amelia Hall joined the company along with people such as Herbert Whittaker and David Gardner, both of whom would later become active in the planning of the NTS. There were others in Montreal who taught in the theatre, including Charles Rittenhouse, who introduced drama to Protestant Schools,<sup>103</sup> as well as actress Dorothy Davis and dancer Violet Walters, who founded the Montreal Children's Theatre (MCT) with their school in 1933.<sup>104</sup>

In French-speaking Quebec, several semi-professional companies also emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, two of which eventually professionalized into Théâtre du Rideau Vert and Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. The precursor of both was Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent, initially a student group which put on productions at the Collège de Saint-Laurent under the direction of Father (Pere) Émile Legault. Pere Legault's passion for the theatre earlier had taken him to France where he studied the theatrical style of Jacques Copeau. When he returned and instituted the ideas of Copeau (and Copeau's nephew Michel Saint-Denis), Les Compagnons became the most revered amateur company in Canada at the time, French or English.

Like Copeau and Saint-Denis, Pere Legault trained his actors in improvisation, as well as stage design, make-up, costumes, dance, music, and theatre history. Legault would also invite in professional artists, such as French-Russian actress Ludmilla Pitoëff. Emerging actors like Jean Gascon and Jean-Louis Roux—both of whom would later become leaders of the NTS—learned much from Legault. Pitoëff, Roux said, “taught me, she was my school...She taught me how to breathe, how to act, etc. And she taught me how to work, to be more disciplined on the stage.”<sup>105</sup>

Interestingly, Gascon and Roux would themselves later choose to study in France at Copeau's École du Vieux-Colombier. "All the people of my age," Roux said,

who got educated in the classical course were very European-minded, French-minded. During the war we were completely cut off from France and from writers we used to cherish and respect a lot, like André Gide. So immediately when the war ended our first idea...was to go to Europe...both of us [Gascon and Roux] were anxious to stay there...<sup>106</sup>

They did return to Canada, however, and by 1951, they formed Théâtre du Nouveau Monde—the largest regional theatre in Quebec—and began their own theatre school there. According to Roux, they felt they needed to teach their actors "because we felt that the actors and actresses we were working with lacked training...that we had to teach them practically everything on stage."<sup>107</sup> Unfortunately, financial burdens weighed them down and Théâtre du Nouveau Monde was forced to close its school after just a few years.

Two other schools also offered theatre training in Quebec in the early 1950s—l'École d'Art Dramatique<sup>108</sup> de Hull and Le Conservatoire de Musique et d'art Dramatique in Montreal. In Hull, Quebec—just outside of Ottawa—René Provost, an actor and printing shop owner, founded his l'École d'Art Dramatique. The school began with 82 students registered, but ended the year with only 32.<sup>109</sup> Le Conservatoire de Musique et d'art Dramatique, on the other hand, began as a music school, opening a drama section in 1954. Created by composer William Pelletier, the Conservatoire's theatre wing was run by Jan Doat, a former student of Copeau's. In 1957, Jean Valcourt from the Comédie-Française became its director.

## **Ontario**

In Ontario, theatre training was equally potted. In the 1930s, theatre training of sorts began to appear in Ontario universities, though it was more for social etiquette than training for

the stage. “To learn the rudiments of voice production, movement, and acting always seemed to pose the question, for what purpose? It was not respectable to train for the professional stage; apprenticeship was the preferred route for that.”<sup>110</sup> Young members of the upper class, nonetheless, were privileged to attend schools of elocution—that is,

to learn civilized behaviour: manners, poise, good speech, dancing, music, and appreciation of art and literature. Schools such as the Toronto Conservatory of Music helped to endow the élite with the veneer of refinement, while incidentally providing for several a preparation for the stage”<sup>111</sup>

Others sought to make the most out of what they had available to them.

Actor Donald Davis recalled his childhood summers in the 1930s in Muskoka with a family friend, Josephine Barrington, an occasional actress and drama teacher. Though she did not run a school as such, she taught regular drama classes to children, introducing them to Shakespeare. “It wasn’t like RADA or Central or anything,”<sup>112</sup> Davis explained, but she was more than capable of teaching. “One wonders,” Davis said, “had Josephine been born twenty years later, if she mightn’t have been teaching professional actors. But at that time, if you were going to do that, there weren’t any professional actors to teach....”<sup>113</sup> There was also no professional theatre to teach for, “not by that time,” Davis stated, and “certainly not a native one...one that was generically grown here.”<sup>114</sup>

Amelia Hall, too, felt Canada lacked a theatre to work and train in, recalling her own attempts to acquire a scholarship so that she could go to England for theatre education after completing her teaching studies at the Ontario College of Education:

I had to do something to earn my living, and there was no theatre here. And I didn’t have enough money to go to England.... I wanted to go to England to study voice, speech, and drama, and that I would promise to come back and teach it in Canada. I must have been rather desperate to say I wanted to come back and teach because I really didn’t want to do that, but I thought ‘only in England’ can I expand my knowledge of theatre, so I’ll have to do it this way.<sup>115</sup>

Canadian actress Francis Hyland also sought training in the late 1940s but realized she had to leave the country to find it, specifically at England's Royal Academy of Drama Arts.<sup>116</sup> For Hyland, however, the experience at RADA was not so positive, noting that the training was too rigidly focused on the external at the expense of the actor's feelings. "She came to realize that there were serious drawbacks to the training she had received at RADA," Sperdakos wrote, adding too that Hyland recalled her voice classes as being "badly taught"<sup>117</sup> because of the physical strain from the "externalized form" of training.<sup>118</sup> She did not complete the program, leaving in her second year. Clearly, despite training opportunities outside of Canada, leaving the country did not always prove useful for aspiring actors.

Yet numerous schools were appearing, in Ontario and especially in the Toronto area. As far back as 1925, the Toronto Theatre Guild had offered academic courses in drama while in 1927 the Canadian Academy of Dramatic Arts began offering courses in breathing, speech, and mimetic action and response. In 1928, Herman Voaden began teaching at the Toronto Central High School of Commerce and in 1929 served as Director of the Modern Drama Course at the University of Toronto. He was also Director of the Summer Course Drama and Play Production at Queen's University from 1934 to 1936, while also directing and teaching his company, The Play Workshop. The Toronto Children's Theatre was run by Dorothy Goulding from 1934 and Sterndale Bennett operated a Summer School of Acting and Producing in 1938, which by 1950 was called the Canadian Theatre School and offered summer and winter classes.

Near the end of the Second World War, Marjorie Purvey—a graduate of the London College of Music in England—founded the Toronto School of Drama (1944) where she taught both children and adults. There was also the Toronto School of [Radio] Drama from 1945, the Royal Conservatory Opera School in 1946, and the Hambourg School of Voice and Microphone



Technique in 1949. As David Gardner wrote of this period, “no longer are earnest students to leave Canada for their training.”<sup>119</sup>

In an interview done for The Ontario Historical Studies Series in the 1970s, Don Rubin asked Mavor Moore about the kind of training available in Canada before World War II. Moore explained,

There were a few teachers like the great Eleanor Stuart in Montreal... Bennett, who started out in Edmonton and then came here. Josephine Barrington was teaching here. Amelia Hall in Ottawa was doing some teaching. And that great woman out west, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes. Dorothy Somerset in Vancouver. A few people like that—mostly women—were doing valuable individual and sometimes class teaching, but there were no schools. There was the occasional institution like the Conservatory here in Toronto, which taught classes in elocution, which came to be called ‘speech’, of course. Shortly after the war, I gave a course there on dramatic theory.<sup>120</sup>

Dora Mavor Moore was also teaching in Toronto. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, Dora Mavor Moore—who had been acting in stock companies—brought to Toronto a more formal type of training that offered theatre artists classes in various aspects of performance, particularly elocution. According to Paula Sperdakos, Dora Mavor Moore in the 1920s

began to concentrate on her principal interest, teaching. She soon acquired an excellent reputation as a versatile director and a fine teacher of speech and oral interpretation, and was considered the ideal person to give lectures and speak authoritatively about the professional theatre.<sup>121</sup>

In 1937, she taught Dramatic Expression at Forest Hill Village School and dramatics for the Toronto Playground Association. Dora Mavor Moore also supported numerous drama groups in high schools and collegiate institutes in the city teaching theatre to young women at the Central High School of Commerce, and a dramatics class for the Heliconian Club’s Boys’ and Girls’ Group. She also gave lectures on subjects such as “Good Speech on the Amateur Stage,” “Production of the Form Play with Special Emphasis on Speech,” and “The Place of Dramatics

in Camp.”<sup>122</sup> According to Spurdakos, Dora Mavor Moore kept applying her teaching skills where she could, including at the Margaret Eaton School, the University Extension Players, Victoria College at the University of Toronto, and the YMCA. As Spurdakos puts it, “her reputation at this point was such that she was considered an authority on speech and dramatics training.”<sup>123</sup>

Dora Mavor Moore’s passion for the theatre led her to establish the amateur Village Players, which later evolved into the New Play Society (NPS) with its own small school. The main objective of NPS in the 1940s was “to establish a professional theatre organization that could serve as a training ground and provide work for young Canadian performers, writers, and theatre technicians, so that they would not have to leave the country to study or find work opportunities.”<sup>124</sup> Actor Vernon Chapman, Dora Mavor Moore’s longtime assistant and a teacher at her school, revered her for providing such educational opportunities. “She was marvelous at training people and she had, herself, in comparison to the amateur companies of the day, a very professional attitude...”<sup>125</sup> Dora Mavor Moore claimed that her training was not only for aspiring artists, but also it was a way to “prepare them for life by promoting self-expression.”<sup>126</sup> Her students—the playwright John Herbert studied with her—ranged from children to the elderly, all eager to attend her classes in acting, speech, make-up, mime, and direction.

Also making an impact on students and theatre groups in Toronto was Roy Mitchell. Mitchell was the first director of Hart House Theatre and had much to do with the growth of both the Arts and Letters Club and Hart House in the early 1920s, especially with the Group of Seven and the Arts and Letters Players.<sup>127</sup> Angela Grigor, in her book, *Arthur Lismer, Visionary Art Educator*, notes Roy Mitchell’s influence on the Toronto theatre scene, stating that his collaboration with Vincent Massey at the University of Toronto “resulted in one of the most

complete theatres of its kind in North America and added considerably to the cultural life of the city.”<sup>128</sup> Mitchell was earlier at the heart of the Arts and Letters Club’s activities, inspiring members like Lismer who believed “there was much to learn.”<sup>129</sup> To Mitchell, schools were critical to improve the theatre. As he wrote in *The Creative Theatre*, “we shall only come abreast of the other arts when we have made schools that are of the theatre itself, suited to its peculiar necessities and so shaped that working artists of the theatre will find a direct gain in the wise guidance of them.”<sup>130</sup>

Another figure of the period offering professional-level training was Robert Gill, an American who became director of Hart House Theatre in 1946. Gill came to Toronto, said Donald Davis, from

one of the best training programs in the United States—Carnegie Tech....He was enormously proficient at theatre craft and it wasn’t just earnest discussions about acting. He understood stage design. He understood the technical necessity for things like voice and movement and so on.<sup>131</sup>

Herbert Whittaker recalled Gill’s teaching as both professional and earnest. William Hutt remembered Gill as “a marvelous combination of director-teacher.... absolutely suited for the job he had in directing students and teaching them some of the basics of stage performing.”<sup>132</sup>

Through Gill, Davis and other students from U of T met with various opportunities where they could learn about the theatre, eventually becoming apprentices in summer stock theatres and acquiring hands-on experience. Actress Charmion King recalled learning about lighting and acting particularly through watching Gill in rehearsals. “They were really significant job jobs,” King said, “but it was a very quick and good way to learn about the theatre.”<sup>133</sup> Gill’s ability and willingness to teach inspired his students, particularly Donald and Murray Davis, who later formed the Straw Hat Players where they gained much of their learning of live theatre through

trial and error.<sup>134</sup> Davis often expressed his appreciation for Gill's approach as a director, one who also coached his students and provided them with real training.

He was a great teacher. A really talented teacher. We didn't have classes in the sense that a drama program has now. There wasn't a voice teacher, a movement teacher, or anything of that kind because theatre at the University at that time, and I think this was true all over Canada, was an extra-curricular activity. There were no credits for it whatsoever...I was working with a real professional. Bob was a man who thoroughly understood and felt not one whit embarrassed by the fact that there is a distinct and enormously essential and quite mechanical technique to getting on a play...In the absence of formal training, a great deal of it had to happen in the rehearsal.<sup>135</sup>

Gill would set aside Saturday mornings for classes, which, according to Davis, were voluntary and open to anyone at Hart House who was interested. As a coach, Gill would try to guide his students through what he considered "technical problems" of the actor on stage, such as how to make it visually interesting for an audience to see an actor move from Point A to Point B. As Gill would teach it, said Davis, a curved rather than straight line would elevate the aesthetics of the actor's physical body in space. When it came to voice and speech, their exercises were less intricate—not as concentrated as an official training program would be. Nevertheless, students like Davis learned what they could, adding in daily activities such as singing and dance.

It was clear to many though, to people like John Coulter, that "a school of the arts" was "the necessary fulcrum" at this point to extend "dramatic activity in Ontario."<sup>136</sup> As George Brodersen argued, "...anything as highflown as a Canadian National Theatre...depends on a supply of trained actors, directors, stage technicians, but equally on a trained body of critical opinion and an enlightened and intelligent audience."<sup>137</sup> Opportunities to perform and be evaluated were also needed.

## The Bi-lingual Dominion Drama Festival

It was not until the start of the Dominion Drama Festival in 1932 that the idea of operating a school with a national vision entered serious thinking. That year, Lord Bessborough, Governor General of Canada, decided to establish an annual festival in Canada in which amateur theatre companies would compete from across the country in front of prominent bilingual adjudicators (usually from Britain or France). These groups would ultimately perform classics as well as modern works, and occasionally original plays. Prizes would include trophies and even apprenticeship opportunities.

Herbert Whittaker recalled that during the early years of the DDF, design was an important focus rather than acting “because they were not professionals (that is, with the continuity of the professional) [and] it was not slick. It was rather sincere and perhaps a little slow-paced.”<sup>138</sup> Yet the DDF was more than a showcase of performances. It was where amateurs belonging to university groups or semi-professional theatre companies could test out what they learned from the training they received. As Betty Lee noted,

performances of suitable plays by ladies and gentlemen who were not hell-bent on commercial gain were tolerated and even encouraged—provided the group had background. Background meant that the amateurs belonged to some respectable institution or socially-acceptable history.<sup>139</sup>

Whittaker said that the DDF gave amateur theatre artists the opportunity to learn through experience, as well as gain the expertise of visiting adjudicators like Michel Saint-Denis.<sup>140</sup> “Whatever the future of the Canadian theatre,” Whittaker wrote, “the Dominion Drama Festival will continue for a long time...in its present state of usefulness...for years to come it will likely continue to serve....It must continue to serve as schooling and opportunity for the fledgling actors, directors, and designers.”<sup>141</sup>

What was also partly behind the DDF idea was an opportunity for an exchange of cultural ideas and traditions between English and French Canada, perhaps even the creation of a bi-cultural style. From the start, however, there was a clear tension between the English and French, which made it difficult for the DDF to grow as any sort of a cultural entity. As early as 1933, the problem emerged: the selected adjudicator, British director Rupert Harvey, could not adequately communicate in French, causing “the politics of bilingualism at the 1933 Final [to be] a little stickier...The executive was turning cartwheels to dig bilingual adjudicators out of the woodwork.”<sup>142</sup> Yet, said Betty Lee, “it was thoroughly understood that the organization would remain steadfastly bilingual. No one could shake that.”<sup>143</sup>

In 1937, on the recommendation of British director and playwright, Harley Granville-Barker, Saint-Denis was selected as the first French theatre artist to adjudicate the DDF Finals in Ottawa.<sup>144</sup> Not only would Saint-Denis appease the rift between the cultures with his ability to handle both languages, but also his experience working in both cultures and being deeply involved in established theatre schools would provide the necessary guidance that the DDF was looking for.<sup>145</sup>

Saint-Denis’ first impressions of Canada, its people and its theatre were “publicly” positive. “They are doing fine work for the encouragement of the theatre in Canada,”<sup>146</sup> he said after the 1937 Festival concluded. “The organization has done much to encourage appreciation of the theatre throughout the Dominion since its foundation four years ago...”<sup>147</sup> Yet Saint-Denis also seemed to sense very quickly a lack of leadership in guiding the Canadian theatre toward some level of professionalism. As he put it, “a leader and a central organization to bind all its little theatre activities together—such is the chief need of Canadian drama at the moment...”<sup>148</sup>

I know distances in Canada are immense, but a more frequent interchange of ideas would be valuable. Another thing that would help is a visit of a first-class

professional company to this country each year.<sup>149</sup> That would give Canadians a wider standard of comparison in theatrical art.<sup>150</sup>

Of the performances he saw that year at the DDF, none were at the highest level, but, as he most diplomatically stated, “these are healthy amateur ventures.”<sup>151</sup> In fact, the influences of Saint-Denis’ own training would seep into the Canadian theatre in more ways than just his adjudications. Numerous young Quebec artists like Pere Legault were already studying in France. The DDF recognized Saint-Denis’ value very early on and wanted him back on a regular basis. But so did others.

Unfortunately for Canada, Saint-Denis’ focus was on the Old Vic School in London. But the DDF kept in touch and in 1950, Saint-Denis was again in Canada adjudicating, this time in Calgary where he was warmly welcomed by all the participants including playwright Robertson Davies, who was then working on a theatre brief for Vincent Massey and his Royal Commission in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences. Davies spoke with Saint-Denis in Calgary and wrote to him shortly after.

When we met at the Dominion Drama Festival at Calgary you expressed some interest in a Memorandum which I was preparing at that time for the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts in Canada. You may recall that you suggested to me in a conversation that we had on the Sunday following the Festival that a founding of a Theatre Centre in Canada was a project very near to your heart.... I hope that you may find it of interest and you will find that your suggestion has been included in the Memorandum and that your name has been mentioned there as a man to whom the Canadian theatre may look for expert advice.<sup>152</sup>

Saint-Denis was also speaking about Canada while he was abroad. In England he wrote to the British Council’s Evelyn M. Williams, saying, “you will certainly be glad to know that the Festival in Calgary was a success,

by which I mean that it took place in a theatre seating 400, which was packed for three quarters of the time, which seems to me very good for a town of 100,000 inhabitants, who are unaccustomed to live theatre. Moreover, the quality of the public was first class; they listened with great concentration and seemed to be

quite unprejudiced... I found that since 1937, the Festival had become much more important and significant an event in the life of Canada. The local committees consist of people who have either got an influential social position, or who are well known in the artistic world. In these conditions, the amateur theatre movement has got a chance to be well supported financially—in spite of many difficulties—and well guided artistically. In London, Toronto and Montreal the movement is beginning to develop into some sort of professional activity.... The usual difficulties go on between the English and the French Canadians.... They want to send as many people as they can to this country [England] to be trained as producers, designers and actors, to improve their standard in all these fields. I am extremely interested in what is going on in Canada, and am certainly going to keep in touch with them.<sup>153</sup>

In this sense, Saint-Denis appeared confident in the future of the Canadian theatre, based on what he witnessed from the DDF. He acknowledged the DDF as necessary and a good starting point, suggesting that with the right influences the theatre in Canada stood a chance in becoming a real player in the wider theatre world. And, at that point, Saint-Denis was fascinated by the English-French battles in this area.

Herbert Whittaker would also later argue that the DDF was the key means through which the idea of a *national* theatre school in Canada could be realized. Indeed, he noted that the NTS “had its true beginnings among the grass-roots of the old Dominion Drama Festival.”<sup>154</sup> He was not the only one. Yves Bourassa, who presided over the DDF Festival in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal made nearly the same point. He saw a professional school

as really an offshoot of the Dominion Drama Festival and don't let anybody tell you different. It wasn't set up by the ITI [International Theatre Institute]<sup>155</sup> or whatever it was, it was through the tenacity and the persistence of people such as Roy Stewart and Pauline McGibbon and others in the Dominion Drama Festival.<sup>156</sup>



## The Support of the Massey Commission

Robertson Davies once said that among all of the aspects which made up his report on the Canadian theatre for the Massey Commission, the creation of an institution for advanced theatre training was the most important:

...some sort of training school, some sort of training ground from which professional actors could emerge.... In those days it seemed a very, very distant hope indeed. I think that was the one thing that I suggested there that I would wholeheartedly stand by.<sup>157</sup>

In Davies' "Dialogue on the State of Theatre in Canada," two characters—Trueman and Lovewit—discuss the state of the Canadian theatre and specifically emphasize that the major obstruction to its growth is the fact that there has been no high level theatre education to train practitioners. The lack of some kind of a national school was preventing, as a result, the development of a national style of drama and performance. As Trueman states, "[a]cting, as a profession, is still in its infancy in Canada. We might hope for the establishment of a native tradition if there were not strong forces working against it."<sup>158</sup> Trueman notes among these forces are the popularity of radio and television, claiming that preparation for a career in those mediums did not require much technique, at least the type of technique to provide the actor with enough theatrical knowledge to work on the stage. Lovewit agrees that "[r]adio acting makes no demands upon the body; an actor whose body is untrained will never make his mark upon the stage except in a limited range of roles.... Acting in the classics, or in a modern play which is not realistic in manner, is impossible for him..."<sup>159</sup> "Radio," Lovewit concludes, "unaided by the stage, has not produced a single actor of the first rank.... what passes for sincerity in radio has nothing to do with the larger sincerity which is demanded of an actor who must fill a theatre with sound."<sup>160</sup>

Trueman goes on to argue that if one wants to keep Canadian actors in Canada, “I would...make it possible for them to study at home.”<sup>161</sup> Specifically using Saint-Denis’ term “theatre centre” (later picked up in the names of the UNESCO-affiliated Canadian Theatre Centre and again in the Manitoba Theatre Centre),

...the time is ripe for the establishment of a Theatre Centre, where all the arts of the theatre could be studied and practiced under expert supervision, and where our excellent amateurs could find the polishing they need to make them good professionals, as well as the inspiration to carry them beyond their present limited artistic vision. Government assistance in establishing such a centre would be public money well spent.<sup>162</sup>

Davies clarifies the notion of a wide-ranging theatre centre as not solely a school, but a centre which would include a company and a training wing. He makes specific reference to Saint-Denis’ Old Vic Theatre Centre in England and even recommends Saint-Denis—as he himself informed Saint-Denis earlier—as leader in the establishment of such a centre in Canada:

I have the assurance of Saint-Denis...that he is willing and indeed eager to help in the establishment of such a centre here. What better model than the Old Vic Centre? What better advisor than the director of that centre and one of the ablest men of the theatre in the world today? If anything is to be done, Saint-Denis is your man; and it isn’t everyday that people of his quality offer to help a struggling art in a new country.<sup>163</sup>

In its final Report, the Massey Commission made many recommendations based on Davies’ report. The most crucial of the Massey recommendations was government subsidy of theatre (the Canada Council), but second was the need for a proper theatre school. The Commission acknowledged the existing ad hoc programs and opportunities being already offered across the country through universities and small private schools, but it too recognized that an institution totally dedicated to the study of theatre, in all its forms, was still needed.

Throughout the country...drama and the arts of the theatre are receiving increased attention from educational authorities and voluntary organizations concerned with adult education. A few Canadian universities have full-time departments of drama, and in such summer schools as the Banff School of Fine Arts much excellent work is being done. But nowhere in Canada does there exist advanced

training for the playwright, the producer, the technician or the actor; nor does it seem rational to advocate the creation of suitable schools of dramatic art in Canada when present prospects for the employment in Canada of the graduates seems so unfavourable.<sup>164</sup>

Clearly, by 1951—with the release of the Massey Commission Report—the demand for theatre training was palpable. Needed most urgently, said the Report, was a regional network of professional theatre companies that would be “principally engaged in bringing the theatre to all communities in Canada.”<sup>165</sup> Such regional companies would also need purpose-built theatres, as well as studios where the experimentation and development of original works could take place. All of this, it was hoped, would come into being through government support, and behind it all, the idea of a theatre school to feed into all these new ventures.

In a sense, the Massey Commission was a culmination of all the arguments over many decades, a consensus that to achieve a truly national theatre movement there would also need to be a national school for theatre training. “It would, of course, be disastrous to conceive of the National Theatre merely as a playhouse,” the final Report of the Massey Commission noted, “erected in the capital or in one of the larger cities, [and] it seems apparent that the national company of players would require a base for their operations and that the advanced school should have adequate quarters for instructional purposes and for performances.”<sup>166</sup> Put more clearly, the Massey Commission was arguing that without a national theatre school, the search for an indigenous drama and theatrical style in Canada might not happen.

Indeed, the “world” from which the idea of the National Theatre School emerged was one of an amateur Canadian theatre at the turn of the twentieth century that was ready to develop professionally, but on its own accord and within its own borders including a professional training institution. Also apparent at that time, however, was the ongoing cultural conflict between

Canada's English- and French-speaking communities, making it clear that in order to achieve a professional theatre school in Canada, it needed to be national and bi-cultural.

The next chapter will look at the step-by-step process of creating precisely that. More specifically, we will look at the "agents" including members of the School's early Pro-Tem Committee and their visions for the School, along with their relations to the Dominion Drama Festival, as well as to the newly-formed professionally-oriented Canada Council, and the newly-created Canadian Theatre Centre (the national centre of the UNESCO-affiliated and also professionally-oriented International Theatre Institute).

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Postlewait, introduction to *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid,

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>16</sup> By 1952, Saint-Denis had established two prestigious theatre schools in England, The London Studio and the Old Vic School, making his reputation recognized in Europe and North America for establishing professional theatre training institutions.

<sup>17</sup> Pauline McGibbon and David Gardner, “A Step by Step History of the Founding of a Canadian School of Dramatic Art,” n.d., 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Spensley, “A Brief History of the National Theatre School of Canada,” ed. Jean-Louis Roux, Michel Garneau, and Tom Hendry, *l'École: Le Premier Quart de Siècle de l'École Nationale du Théâtre du Canada/ The School: The First Quarter of a Century of the National Theatre School of Canada*, (Montréal: Stanké, 1985), 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> J.L. Granatstein, forward to *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), n. pag.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> J.E.Middleton, “The Theatre in Canada (1750-1880),” (1914), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Tippett, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 36.

<sup>26</sup> “Semi-professional” refers to theatre companies which received payment for performances, but which did not rely entirely on their productions to make a living.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the main discussion of the period with regards to developing an indigenous theatre in Canada revolved around playwriting and the need for Canadian playwrights and a Canadian drama. Sandwell is one of the first critics to be concerned with actors and acting, acknowledging the need to address what was lacking for aspiring Canadian actors in the Canadian theatre.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard. K. Sandwell, “The Annexation of Our Stage,” (1911), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 17.

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- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Arthur Beverly Baxter, "The Birth of the National Theatre," (1916), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 43.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>36</sup> Harcourt Farmer, "Play-writing in Canada," (1919), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 44.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 46.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 47.
- <sup>41</sup> Susan McNicoll, *The Opening Act: Canadian Theatre History, 1945-1953*, (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2012), 77.
- <sup>42</sup> Vincent Massey, "Prospects of a Canadian Theatre," (1922), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 53.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 54.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 55.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 55.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 58.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 61-62.
- <sup>51</sup> Herman Voaden, "What is Wrong with the Canadian Theatre?" (1929), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 87.
- <sup>52</sup> Transcript of interview with Herman Voaden by Don Rubin, 1975, 53, RG 47-27-2-37, The Ontario Historical Study Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.
- <sup>53</sup> Betty Lee, *Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*, (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1973), 78.
- <sup>54</sup> Ross Stuart and Ann Stuart, "University Theatre," *Later Stages: Essays in Ontario Theatre from the First World War to the 1970s*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer and Richard Plant (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 310.
- <sup>55</sup> Merrill Denison, "Hart House Theatre," (1923), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 68.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Transcript of interview with Dora Mavor Moore by Don Rubin, 1976, 14, RG 47-27-2-24, The Ontario Historical Study Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.
- <sup>58</sup> According to James Hoffman, Aikins was influenced by the "period of the 'new' theatre as proclaimed by effusive visionaries" ("Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre," 1986). His studies in Europe, specifically England, France, and Germany, led him to the works of "visionaries" including lighting designer Adolph Appia, stage designer and director Edward Gordon Craig, as well as teacher and director Jacques Copeau. Copeau, Hoffman noted, had a particular effect on

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Aikins, who admired Copeau's simple, minimal staging of the poetic and his approach to training young actors—that is, an approach which emphasized rigorous technical work in voice, speech, and movement.

<sup>59</sup> James Hoffman, "Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 7.1 (1986): n. pag., accessed June 1, 2015, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7407/8466>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Hoffman, "L. Bullock-Webster and the B.C. Dramatic School, 1921-1932," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 8.2 (1987): n. pag., accessed June 1, 2015, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/TRIC/article/view/7363>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ross Stuart, *The History of Prairie Theatre*, (Toronto: Simon & Pierre Pub. Co., 1983), 138.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Sterling Haynes (1897-1957). English-born, this actor, director, and community and education drama specialist acted under Roy Mitchell at the Hart House Theatre in 1919 after graduating at the University of Toronto, and later moved to Edmonton, Alberta, where she took part in the little theatre movement and established a reputation as an "innovative drama educator" and "provincial drama specialist" for the University of Alberta (Moirá Day, "Elizabeth Sterling Haynes," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2007). As a director, Haynes experimented with some of Copeau's minimalist staging ideas as well as expressionism, and her actors became exposed to rigorous training individually and as an ensemble with elements of Stanislavskian technique (Moirá Day and Marilyn Potts, "Elizabeth Haynes Sterling: Initiator of Alberta Theatre," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada*, 8.1 (1987). According to Day and Potts, she believed in the importance of the director's vision, reverence for text, and in technical knowledge, as well as the need for constructive criticism as opposed to competition.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart, 136.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Roy Mitchell (1884-1944). Michigan-born, this teacher, director, and journalist was a spearhead in the little theatre movement (Renate Usmani, "Roy Mitchell: Prophet in Our Past," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 8.2 (1987): n. pag.). Mitchell's work tended to rebel against the realistic movement in the theatre, often experimenting with

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expressionism and other theatrical styles such as symbolism, having been influenced by Europe's Edward Gordon Craig and Adolph Appia (Usmiani). According to Usmiani, Mitchell had "a view of theatre as a communal, creative, and active, rather than passive, experience....He calls for a renewal, for theatre to become, 'not just recreation ... but a creative force in the community.'" Mitchell's *Creative Theatre* dedicates a chapter, "The New Generation," to the idea of schools and theatre education in which he emphasizes the need for theatre training in order to preserve knowledge and what he believed to be the spirit of the theatre (Mitchell, 195-210).

<sup>83</sup> Stuart, 139.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>91</sup> After touring American colleges and universities in 1956, Saint-Denis criticized accredited drama programs in post-secondary institutions, stating "that graduates of...University courses...would be too old and already too inflexible after their University training, to be an ideal material for enrollment in the full acting course in the School.... It was [also] strongly felt by all that such a School...should not award degrees or attempt to establish any form of academic credit...The School is not concerned primarily...with giving academic credits or degrees. It is St. Denis' contention that...[this] immediately encourages an entirely different attitude of mind in the student and presumably would divert the student from the main goal—i.e. a preparation for a career in the professional theatre" ("Preliminary Outline for the establishment of a National Bi-lingual School for the Theatrical Arts," 13 June, 1959). Indeed, these views would influence how he advised the establishment of the NTS.

<sup>92</sup> Stuart, 137.

<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that at that time, the idea of a "Centre" implied more than just a community space and/or theatre space for productions. Saint-Denis' Old Vic Centre in London, England and the Centre Dramatique de L'Est in Strasbourg, France included theatre schools, and even Robertson Davies in his report to the Massey Commission called for a "Theatre Centre" to be built that would also include a school. The MTC, as directed by Hirsch, would encourage and promote professional theatre activity, but it would do this partly through a school attached to it and a theatre company.

<sup>94</sup> Fraidie Martz and Andrew Wilson, *A Fiery Soul: the Life and Theatrical Times of John Hirsch*, Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2011, 114.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>96</sup> Stuart., 151.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



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- <sup>103</sup> Patrick G. Neilson, "Charles Burket Rittenhouse: Theatrical Avocations and Affiliations 1925-1976," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 4.1 (1983): n. pag., accessed February 17, 2016, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7478/8537>.
- <sup>104</sup> "Our History," *Montreal Children's Theatre*, <http://www.childrens-theatre.ca/our-history>.
- <sup>105</sup> McNicoll, 230.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid., 239.
- <sup>108</sup> It is uncertain as to when exactly this school opened as no specific founding date was found in any documents.
- <sup>109</sup> Newspaper clipping, "Drama in School," June 27, 1950, 15, David Gardner Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
- <sup>110</sup> Stuart and Stuart, "University Theatre," 316.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>112</sup> Transcript of interview with Donald Davis by Don Rubin, 1975, 9, RG 47-27-2-41, The Historical Studies Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>115</sup> Transcript of interview with Amelia Hall by Don Rubin, 1979, 18, RG 47-27-2-11, The Ontario Historical Studies Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.
- <sup>116</sup> Paula Sperdakos, "Acting in Canada in 1965: Francis Hyland, Kate Reid, Martha Henry and John Hirsch's *The Cherry Orchard* at Stratford," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 19.1 (1998): n. pag., accessed February 9, 2016, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7117/8176>.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>118</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>119</sup> David Gardner notes, "Drama Schools of Toronto Between the 1920s and 1960s," 1985, 2, David Gardner Papers, Thomas Fisher and Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
- <sup>120</sup> Transcript of interview with Mavor Moore by Don Rubin, 1975, 31, RG 47-27-2-26, The Ontario Historical Studies Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.
- <sup>121</sup> Paula Sperdakos, "Dora Mavor Moore: Before the New Play Society," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 10.1 (1989): n. pag., accessed February 9, 2016, <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7324/8383>.
- <sup>122</sup> Sperdakos, *Dora Mavor Moore, Pioneer of the Canadian Theatre*, (Toronto, ON: ECW Press, 1995), 114.
- <sup>123</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>124</sup> Ibid., 150.
- <sup>125</sup> McNicoll, 111.
- <sup>126</sup> Ibid., 121.
- <sup>127</sup> Karen A. Finley, *The Force of Culture: Vincent Massey and Canadian Sovereignty*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 96.
- <sup>128</sup> Angela N. Grigor, *Arthur Lismer, Visionary Art Educator*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 52.
- <sup>129</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>130</sup> Roy Mitchell, *The Creative Theatre*, (Westwood, N.J.: Priv. Print. [by] Kindle Press, 1969), 198, F0358, Roy Mitchell Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>131</sup> McNicoll, 156.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>135</sup> Transcript of interview with Donald Davis by Don Rubin, 99.

<sup>136</sup> John Coulter, "Towards a Canadian Theatre," (1945), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 133.

<sup>137</sup> George Brodersen, "Towards a Canadian Theatre," (1947), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 152.

<sup>138</sup> Transcript of interview with Herbert Whittaker by Don Rubin, 1975, 43, RG 47-27-2-40, The Ontario Historical Studies Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.

<sup>139</sup> Lee, *Love and Whiskey*, 65.

<sup>140</sup> In many newspaper articles and personal correspondence, Michel Saint-Denis' name was referred to as "Michel St. Denis." Because Saint-Denis himself wrote his name as such at times, suggesting that there was no consistent way of spelling his name, it was felt that using "[sic]" each time his name was written differently was unnecessary.

<sup>141</sup> Herbert Whittaker, "The Theatre," (1957), *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 222.

<sup>142</sup> Lee, 164.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>145</sup> According to Saint-Denis, he initially accepted the adjudicator position because his uncle Jacques Copeau could not attend (A.C. Cummings, "Drama Adjudicator," *Winnipeg Tribune*, February 2, 1937, 9). But Saint-Denis expressed that he was "qualified to deputize for him, since I worked for him 10 years" (C.P. Haves, "Drama Festival Adjudicator Eager to Come," *Ottawa Journal*, January 13, 1937, 14). As Haves added, "M. Saint-Denis' experiences in the theatre have prepared him for the bilingual task before him" that is, his experience teaching, directing, and founding theatre companies and schools in England and in France.

<sup>146</sup> C.P. Haves, "Drama Festival Adjudicator Eager to Come," *Ottawa Journal*, January 13, 1937, 14, accessed March 10, 2015,

<http://www.newspapers.com/image/48453586/?terms=michel%2Bst.%2Bdenis>.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> "Little Theatre Forging Rapidly Ahead in Canada," *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 10, 1937, 31, accessed March 13, 2015,

<http://www.newspapers.com/image/39308910/?terms=michel%2Bst.%2Bdenis>.

<sup>149</sup> Saint-Denis did not give any specific example of which touring company he thought Canadians should see. Indeed, by suggesting that a professional company visit Canada each year, Saint-Denis was in a way encouraging the idea of bringing foreign touring groups, which was already much of what was being offered in the country and which was obstructing the emergence of an indigenous theatre and style. Having grown up witnessing theatre from around the world, however, including Russia's Moscow Art Theatre and the Ballet Russes, Japan's Kabuki theatre, and his uncle's own Vieux-Colombier, Saint-Denis clearly saw it necessary for Canadians to

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experience professional quality theatre in order to witness a standard they should be striving, and to experience various theatrical styles born out of different cultural traditions.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Robertson Davis, letter to Saint-Denis, June 5, 1950, MS 81229, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, British Library.

<sup>153</sup> Michel Saint-Denis, letter to Miss Evelyn M. Williams, June 6, 1950, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, British Library.

<sup>154</sup> Whittaker, "NTS Celebrates 25 Years," *Globe and Mail*, October 3, 1984, accessed March 11, 2015,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1237581347/4D5D2774E4BF4D38PQ/21?accountid=15182>.

<sup>155</sup> The International Theatre Institute, or ITI, was founded in 1948 by UNESCO and theatre and dance artists to encourage international cooperation through the promotion of artistic development. The ITI gathers artists and educators from around the world to meet and exchange ideas in the performing arts and education ("History of the ITI," *International Theatre Institute ITI, World Organization for the Performing Arts*).

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Yves Bourassa, [Sound Recording], n.d., R5415-0-1-E, Theatre Canada Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>157</sup> Transcript of interview with Robertson Davies by Don Rubin, 1976, 32, RG 47-27-2-4, The Ontario Historical Study Series Arts Interviews, Archives of Ontario.

<sup>158</sup> Davies, "Dialogue on the State of Theatre in Canada," (1951) *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 160.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>164</sup> "Report: Royal Commission of National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951," (1951) *Canadian Theatre History: Selected Readings*, ed. Don Rubin (Mississauga, Ont.: Copp Clark, 1996), 179.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

# Chapter Two

## Gathering the Forces (1952-1959)

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### A Brief Chronology

#### 1952

- Michel Saint-Denis adjudicates DDF Finals in Saint John, New Brunswick. He is invited to return to Canada to discuss setting up a national theatre school but declines because he is already involved with the establishment of a new theatre school in Strasbourg, France.

#### 1956

- Saint-Denis is invited by the Rockefeller Foundation to advise on the establishment of the Juilliard School in New York.

#### 1957

- The Canadian Theatre Centre is established to represent the interests of the professional Canadian theatre within Canada. Externally it will serve as representative to UNESCO's International Theatre Institute (ITI).
- The Canada Council is created providing for the first time government subsidy for the arts and humanities. The Council's theatre panel puts the establishment of a Canadian theatre school at the top of its list of priorities.
- Saint-Denis meets with Robin Patterson and philanthropist Lady Flora Eaton to discuss his coming to Canada to advise on professional theatre training.
- Saint-Denis accepts the Rockefeller Foundation's offer to help establish Juilliard.

#### 1958

- Saint-Denis travels to the United States for Rockefeller to survey American theatre schools.
- May 14. With the financial help of the Rockefeller Foundation, Saint-Denis attends the DDF Finals in Halifax where he gives a speech on professional theatre training and how it could work in Canada.
- May 22. After speaking with Saint-Denis, a group of individuals agree to establish a Steering Committee to begin planning for a national theatre school.

- June 12. The Steering Committee changes its name to the Pro-Tem Committee.
- Summer. Tom Patterson is asked by the Committee to investigate location and funding for the School. Yves Bourassa and Jean Pelletier investigate the involvement of Quebec.
- August 30. The professionally-oriented Canadian Theatre Centre agrees to become involved in the establishment of the School.
- Saint-Denis agrees to help the Pro-Tem Committee. He also agrees to adjudicate the 1959 DDF Finals in Toronto where they can discuss plans.

## 1959

- May 19. The Canadian Theatre Centre becomes the legal body for the establishment of a national theatre school. The Pro-Tem Committee in turn becomes the CTC's Pilot Committee.
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Previous discussions surrounding the National Theatre School of Canada acknowledge an original 16-member Pro-Tem Committee, as well as Michel Saint-Denis as key contributors to the School's establishment. But these studies fail to address a number of key questions. How did those individuals come together? How did they manage to secure Saint-Denis? How did they build relationships with the new Canadian Theatre Centre? How did they overcome financial and political obstructions? This chapter will try to answer these questions and provide a new understanding on how the first professional theatre training institution in Canada was put together through the dynamic of the relationships and visions articulated by its founders and agents (in Postlewait's terms).

## The DDF's Role

When Saint-Denis returned to the DDF in 1952 for the third time to adjudicate the Finals in Saint John, New Brunswick, the Festival's bilingual mandate was clear and the idea of a professional theatre training institution was acknowledged. "We are trying to find out if everybody can be educated up to fairly high standards,"<sup>1</sup> Robertson Davies said in a 1953 CBC talk on Canadian culture. The adjudicator's role was "...to raise our level of work in...drama,

and to set our young professionals a very high standard of performance, and also of understanding and criticism from their hearers.”<sup>2</sup> To achieve this though, DDF executives wanted the bilingual Saint-Denis to keep coming back since among the French groups there continued to be “...complaints of ‘non-communication’ within an ‘English-oriented festival.’”<sup>3</sup> Yet it was the DDF which was most persistent in trying to maintain a bi-cultural environment since it saw itself as the breeding ground for a national theatre and, more idealistically, a national theatre school.

In a 1949 brief to the Massey Commission, D. Park Jamieson and H. Alan Skinner, DDF executives, stressed the significant role that the DDF had played, and could continue to play, in the development of Canadian culture. Jamieson stated specifically that the Festival was where English- and French-speaking people could exchange traditions and form relationships.

When the Festival was first inaugurated French speaking Canadians competed in separate regional festivals and in many cases, with different adjudicators. Now all Canadians, irrespective of language, compete together. Originally the final festivals were held in Ottawa, a bi-lingual centre. When it was decided to hold such festivals in Winnipeg, London, Toronto and other predominantly English speaking centres, our French speaking compatriots had some fear as to their reception and equality of recognition in such centres. Not only were their fears groundless, but the presentations in the French language in such centres have done much to increase the knowledge and appreciation of our bi-lingual culture and have created firm friendships in all parts of Canada between French and English speaking Canadians.<sup>4</sup>

Implying that the DDF executives had to maintain some commitment to the French-speaking communities, Jamieson and Skinner stressed that while the Festival may have seemed to francophones to be too English-centred at times, it was a beneficial tactic to bring French productions to English-speaking communities as a way of establishing a relationship between the two cultures.

Indeed, at this point Saint-Denis had become an integral part of the conversation, so much so that important individuals in the DDF such as Pauline McGibbon, Herbert Whittaker,

and Roy Stewart expressed their belief in Saint-Denis and his advice to the Canadian theatre community. McGibbon recalled Saint-Denis saying at the 1952 Finals that “it was a shame...students had to go to the United States or England for training,”<sup>5</sup> and that the aim of a national organization in Canada “should be co-lingual<sup>6</sup>...not bilingual...because of the two cultures. Michel was very interested...”<sup>7</sup> Herbert Whittaker too believed that Saint-Denis’ role in the Canadian theatre could be more than just a DDF adjudicator. He suggested that Saint-Denis could be instrumental in getting the long-dreamed of school off the ground. Writing in a 1952 article for the *Globe and Mail*, he suggested that

[P]erhaps his acceptance once again of the post of adjudicator may be read as token of his interest in the school project. Such a possibility brings courage and new hope to Canadian theatre workers, whatever their category. Such a School and theatre centre as Michel St. Denis would create could bring to fruition the long years of labor by the various theatrical groups in Canada, from the Dominion Drama Festival...while the product of such a school—well-trained, high-principled actors, directors, and designers—would bring the much-needed impetus to our struggling professional theatre. Wherever that theatre school existed, whether it be in Montreal’s Conservatoire, or elsewhere—that place would soon become the heart of theatre in this country. And with his fastidious intellect, clarity of vision, inventiveness and spiritual contribution, to say nothing of the link he supplies between the British theatre, as represented by the Old Vic, and the French theatre, as represented by Le Vieux-Colombier and La Compagnie des Quinze, Michel St. Denis is the right person to set the beat of that heart....we must not let Michel St. Denis go back to England without the maximum attempt to insure his return here on a more permanent basis.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, Whittaker saw Saint-Denis’ return to Canada as some kind of sign that a professionally-trained theatre in Canada was possible and even likely. That same year, Roy Stewart wrote to Saint-Denis, emphasizing that a time of great change was ahead for the Canadian theatre through the DDF and that the man to lead it was Saint-Denis:

As you know, a number of us in Canada think that...theatrical things need to be brought to a head or let the corpse die. As you may or may not know, Herbert Whittaker, in his *Globe and Mail* column, has been the activating force in this movement to bring you to Canada. Herbert, myself and a number of other people believe you are the spark that can set the Canadian theatre on fire.<sup>9</sup>

## **Saint-Denis and More Saint-Denis**

According to Pauline McGibbon, there were people in Ontario—in Toronto and London—as well as in British Columbia who were keen on having Saint-Denis stay in Canada to help oversee the development of specific theatre groups. While in Canada for the Festival, Saint-Denis managed to travel to Toronto on May 5 before heading back to England. It was then that a meeting, hosted by Stewart at his Toronto home, took place. Several people had already offered Saint-Denis work if he would stay. He was asked by Dorothy Somerset of the University of British Columbia to teach acting at the UBC summer school. William Hogg and Alan Skinner of the London Little Theatre and the Western Ontario Drama League (WODL), as well as Roy Stewart on behalf of the Central Ontario Drama League (CODL) also asked for him to do workshops. The hope was that Saint-Denis would divide his time between DDF regions.

In a letter to W.G. Palmer, the Secretary to the Trustee of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, Roy Stewart explained that the purpose of the Toronto meeting was to plan how Saint-Denis' expertise could be used efficiently in Canada,<sup>10</sup> noting that “Mr. St. Denis is the greatest teacher in the English speaking theatre world”<sup>11</sup> and that it may be possible for him to teach directors all across Ontario from two specific locations—Toronto and London—while also producing a play with the London Little Theatre. The CODL had hoped to run a school for directors in Toronto under Saint-Denis' instruction and anyone in the areas outside of western Ontario, from Oakville to the eastern part of the province, would be invited to participate. “We believe,” Stewart wrote, “this is the greatest opportunity for instruction in theatre—amateur or professional—that has happened to Canada.”<sup>12</sup> Roy Stewart explained that a total of approximately \$11,000 would be necessary that first year for Saint-Denis' stay. The London Little Theatre would be able to cover \$4,000 while the CODL agreed to cover \$3,000. He stressed that another \$4,000 was all that was necessary to make it happen.



Stewart wanted a united approach to Saint-Denis and expressed frustration at how many individual groups were already contacting their visitor for their own projects. Stewart later wrote to him:

[a]ll of them, with the exception of Dorothy Somerset, apparently, have rushed to you with separate offers. This seems to me so out of keeping with the spirit in which we arranged the meeting at my home. Personally, I had hoped this would be a co-operative sort of meeting where personal aggrandizement would be forgotten and the whole thought would be—‘how can we get Canadian theatre going?’<sup>13</sup>

Stewart assured Saint-Denis that money (\$11,000) would not be the issue, writing, “[p]ersonally, I have no quarrel with your suggestion of \$9,000 plus traveling expenses....At any rate, as a business man I decided that the business-man’s mind, with all its selfishness and faults—is more simple than the theatrical mind.”<sup>14</sup> Stewart was determined to get Saint-Denis on board and was prepared for his people to top individual offers from the London Little Theatre (an amateur group), The Jupiter Theatre (a semi-professional group), and UBC (a university group) with a significant joint offer:

As far as I personally am concerned, London’s offer is not good enough. I think Dorothy Somerset’s offer [UBC] is good, provided she has told you it is not too exacting....Our annual meeting was held last week and they agreed we should back your visit to the whole of our financial resources. They furthermore set up a committee composed of Herbert Whittaker, Arthur Gelber, Jim Dean, Randolph MacDonald and myself to look after the business. Now in addition to this, a private charitable organization has agreed to venture \$4000.00 on Central Ontario Drama League if we set up a school for Directors and bring you out. In addition to this, Ettore Mazzoleni, Director of the Royal Conservatory Opera phoned me last week and they are prepared to subsidize you if you will organize and direct a drama course commencing October 1<sup>st</sup>, and for 32 weeks thereafter. They have physical space and a stage and we could share in their courses.... Now I hasten to make my personal position clear... I want to see a kick given to Canadian theatre that will tell them where to go....<sup>15</sup>

Although convincing, Stewart’s proposal was still not enough to keep Saint-Denis from declining and accepting instead a position to establish a theatre and an acting school in Strasbourg that same year.<sup>16</sup>

This unfortunate news did not stop the first planners but rather led to the beginning of a still larger discussion—the creation of a national theatre school under Saint-Denis’ supervision and expertise. Saint-Denis was now seen as a necessary contributor to the Canadian project. It was clear at that point, as Pauline McGibbon and David Gardner wrote, that no one “could replace Michel Saint-Denis in their thinking.”<sup>17</sup> Herbert Whittaker said the same in yet another *Globe and Mail* article in 1952.

Michel St. Denis’ acceptance of an offer to establish a theatre centre in Strasbourg for the Province of Alsace puts an end to a concerted effort on the part of a group of assorted theatre people to have the noted French director and teacher employ his talents here in Canada.... It was hoped that Mr. St. Denis would be able to continue his work in Canada. We knew he liked our country and had a feeling for the possibilities of its theatre. We had agreed that he was the right combination of practical theatre-man, teacher and inspirational force that our theatre needed...he was to examine our general needs for the future.... Well supported, the arrival of Michel St. Denis on our shores now depended only upon his personal decision....<sup>18</sup>

As suggested by Whittaker, no one apparently could match Saint-Denis’ expertise. In that same article, Saint-Denis is quoted as saying, “I have been, and still am, very divided in my mind. Canada had a very strong attraction to me, but I had to choose. I would not like you to consider that my relationship with your country stops at that. I will keep in touch with you and I hope to go to Canada again.”<sup>19</sup>

Over the next several years, Saint-Denis was approached again and again by others including a group of Americans also interested in his “schools” skills—Robert Chapman, professor of English at Harvard University, had been commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation to research actor training for what was going to become a professional theatre school in the hub of the American theatre scene, New York. Chapman—with significant funding behind him—spoke to Saint-Denis in 1956 and 1957 about a new theatre and school being set up in New York at Lincoln Center and spent several days in Strasbourg. He wanted Saint-Denis to help establish the Juilliard Drama Division in Manhattan.<sup>20</sup> By 1957, Saint-Denis was interested

enough to make a visit to New York paid for by the Rockefeller Foundation. The Canadians—who continued to invite him to Canada during this period—tagged along for the ride offering to bring him to Toronto from New York.

## **The Professionals Intervene**

By this time, the newly-created Canada Council was also in operation. One of its key interests was in fact to help bring into being a professionally-oriented theatre school. Given that interest, funding seemed viable. Also established by this time was a Canadian section of UNESCO's International Theatre Institution (ITI). Calling itself the Canadian Theatre Centre (CTC), it would bring an even stronger professional focus into the planning of such a school. The Canadian Theatre Centre—the professional theatre community by any other name—had representation from various regions of Canada with some of its members also involved with the DDF. Among the first CTC executive were actor-writer Mavor Moore (who served as first Chair), actor-director Jean Gascon, actor-writer Gratien Gélinas, actors David Gardner, Douglas Rain, and Jean-Louis Roux, and Stratford Festival founder Tom Patterson (and his wife, Robin, who would play a key role in the preliminary planning for the School). Also involved were director Dennis Sweeting and teacher Dorothy Somerset.

A promotional letter was sent out over David Gardner's signature to generate interest in the new Canadian Theatre Centre and the ITI. It stated that its goal was "the promotion of a national exchange of knowledge and practice in Canadian Theatre Arts."<sup>21</sup> Robin Patterson later wrote that the CTC would also bring into the School equation "English- and French-speaking Canadians from right across the continent."<sup>22</sup>

In the summer of 1957, the Stratford Festival was beginning its own touring company, the Canadian Players. It needed an Artistic Director, and it too felt Saint-Denis was the man. On behalf of the Festival, Robin Patterson—with the financial assistance of Lady Flora Eaton, wife of the Toronto Department store President Sir John Craig Eaton—traveled to England to speak to Saint-Denis about taking the position. Saint-Denis suggested that a connection be made between the Canadian Players and the proposed school.<sup>23</sup> Robin Patterson brought the idea back to Stratford suggesting that Saint-Denis might be interested in the Canadian Players if Stratford lent its weight to the School project.

Continuing contact with Saint-Denis, Robin Patterson wrote, “I [am] enthused with your ideas for a bi-lingual school here in Canada. We have mentioned the suggestion to one or two of our close colleagues and they have been equally excited.”<sup>24</sup> She added that “from a completely dispassionate (and Canadian) point of view, we want to do everything we can to insure that such a scheme be launched on the highest possible footing and in the right hands. With your assistance, this would be possible.”<sup>25</sup> Saint-Denis reassured her of his interest, noting that his Rockefeller grant to travel to the United States in the spring of 1958 to observe theatre training in American universities and colleges could also cover expenses for a visit to Canada. He advised her and the others “to be careful with the direction of a School for Drama,” stating that “the right people are difficult to find.”<sup>26</sup>

As the lengthy correspondence connected to Saint-Denis’ visit shows, Robin Patterson emphasized several times that “the interest in the prospect of [his] coming to Canada is very great,” and that “[t]here is no one...that has not been greatly enthused....Amongst those to whom I have spoken were some connected with the Dominion Drama Festival...”<sup>27</sup> She noted

that with Saint-Denis involved, the DDF, Canada Council, and the new Canadian Theatre Centre would probably also be involved heavily as well. She acknowledged to Saint-Denis that the DDF

is a force in the land, and has behind it money and position.... We [also] intend putting out lines of communication to the professional companies, and hope to co-ordinate some measure of opinion....All the people to whom you have spoken feel that your time should not be wasted when you come to Canada...<sup>28</sup>

The DDF clearly saw itself as an influential organization, but it was willing to put it all into Saint-Denis' hands, emphasizing that the DDF could help propel the idea of a school and that he himself "can help the young with criticism and advice and also training."<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, when the original planners and the CTC heard that Saint-Denis might be returning, he once again began receiving ad hoc offers of work in Canada. Some included specific requests from the planners to participate in discussions about the future School, some to adjudicate at the DDF, some to lecture at emerging professional theatres like Donald Davis' Crest Theatre in Toronto. Saint-Denis was careful, however. He wanted to make sure that anything he was seriously involved in would be professionally focused.

To his surprise, he found that Herbert Whittaker was already spreading word of his supposed arrival and plans in the *Globe and Mail*. In a letter to Robin Patterson, Saint-Denis wrote,

I was a little alarmed when I saw the press announced in terms which are more definite than reality the purpose of my journey to the USA and to you. I am not going to direct a school in New York. I am only going for consultations....The press announced also that I would direct one or two plays for the Canadian Players. As you know, this has not been settled between us....<sup>30</sup>

Robin Patterson reassured him that people were simply enthusiastic about his coming and that it would be understood if he chose not to take on the Canadian Players. "Although it would be wonderful for the Canadian Players if you were able to direct, I feel that the most important thing for Canada as a whole is to obtain your advice on a school which could serve us all in the

future.”<sup>31</sup> Saint-Denis saw the Canadian Players, however, as a way to assess the level of professionalism in Canada.

I would very much like to have the opportunity of appreciating Canadian acting at work; it would be very good information for me also in view of training. But I need to know more about the players....It is quite clear that my main concern is with the sort of activity which can help the young with criticism and advice and also training. That is why the Canadian Players interest me and, even more, the establishment of a school which could really prepare the future. I am sure the influence of the D.D.F. would help in that direction.<sup>32</sup>

Though plans were yet to be finalized, Saint-Denis was scheduled to go to the U.S. from March 1 until May 31, 1958. The DDF hoped that Saint-Denis would adjudicate their Finals in Halifax from May 10 to 18. He did ultimately attend the event but not as adjudicator, merely as an invited guest. “I was at first very attracted at the idea of adjudicating your finals for the fourth time,” he wrote to DDF President Richard McDonald, but “[a]fter much thought, if I decided not to do it this time it was partly because I dreaded the effort and was afraid that tiredness would prevent me from giving to the job the sort of zest I need to put into it.”<sup>33</sup> Saint-Denis made it clear that though the main purpose of this North American visit was to be the New York-Juilliard initiative, he believed there were also “other matters of theatrical interests”<sup>34</sup> to be discussed in Canada.

The DDF continued to press him. “We would love to have you as our final adjudicator... We...regard you as le Prince du Theatre. I hope you have the happy recollections of us, that we entertain for you.”<sup>35</sup> In his response to Roy Stewart—with whom he planned to stay while in Toronto—Saint-Denis explained that the reason he left Strasbourg was because of the toll his own hectic schedule took on his health. “That is why I did not feel I could adjudicate the Festival....it was painful for me to take that decision.”<sup>36</sup> Despite that, Saint-Denis himself brought up the idea of the national theatre school again, stating that his time in Strasbourg confirmed to him that “education and training...were essential for Canada.”<sup>37</sup>

With the Rockefeller Foundation supportive of his Canadian side trip to Canada, Saint-Denis wrote to Pauline McGibbon that “I feel in Canada...I should concentrate on advice towards improvement in the theatre and training the young...I am more experienced than I was and not yet old. I could be used further.”<sup>38</sup> McGibbon wrote back that Albert Trueman, Director of the still new Canada Council, was “looking forward to discussing the need in training directors, actors, etc.,”<sup>39</sup> and that she herself had planned to discuss more on the School with other DDF executives. Robin Patterson, though still pushing a Saint-Denis connection for the Canadian Players and Stratford, continued to hold out the possibility of connecting both to a Canadian theatre school.

Saint-Denis told her that he appreciated “the fact that you yourself feel that I may be more useful in my advice on the establishment of a school, whatever form it may take...”<sup>40</sup> He acknowledged her efforts.

I can see that you are taking a lot of trouble about finding a proper channel to prepare useful consultations about the school problem in Canada. Thank you for the information you give me about the relationship between the Canada Council, the Canadian Theatre Centre, and the D.D.F. I realize that dealing with all those bodies is important and at the same time complicated.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, Robin Patterson and Lady Eaton both met Saint-Denis on his arrival in New York in March to get discussions going again regarding the “possibilities of the school and directing for us.”<sup>42</sup> She was asked by him to set up meetings with representatives of the Canada Council, the DDF, and the Canadian Theatre Centre when he visited Canada.

Saint-Denis agreed to attend the DDF Finals that May and asked Robin Patterson to try to get the others to meet with him there. He also agreed to speak at the DDF event where he could continue to observe Canada’s active amateur theatre. Ultimately, she suggested that during his Canadian visit he might rather see the Canadian Players, emphasizing that all of his expenses would be covered and that “this move would augment the struggling French-English effort.”<sup>43</sup>

Saint-Denis agreed as well to stop in Montreal and Ottawa to meet with the Canada Council, the French Ambassador, and the Governor General. He would finally go to Stratford and then Toronto for additional meetings.

His trip to Canada that year was his first real step toward committing to any involvement at all in the establishment of the hoped for National Theatre School, a possibility about which he felt confident. He corresponded frequently prior to and after his visit with people interested in the project including Mavor Moore, who had written to Saint-Denis to tell him that his Canadian visit was highly anticipated. "I have done a good deal of thinking and chatting with other people about such a school and I write simply to say that it would mean a great deal to all of us concerned to have your views and opinions."<sup>44</sup>

To prepare for his visit in May, McGibbon held a meeting at her home on April 2. Attending were a mix of money and theatre experience: Lady Eaton, Robin Patterson, Eva Langbord, Roy Stewart, Mavor Moore, Herbert Whittaker, members of the Canadian Theatre Centre, the DDF, and the Canadian Players. It was there that several sub-committees were set up to look into a variety of matters. As Robin Patterson wrote to the group just prior to Saint-Denis' arrival in Toronto to clarify the purpose of his visit, he

comes to Toronto at the invitation of a group which feels it should not be necessary for Canadians to leave the country if they wish to take comprehensive theatrical training. The group is fully representative of both professional and amateur theatre, has been working through the winter and is in touch with groups in Quebec City, Montreal and Ottawa. Mr. Saint-Denis has been asked to advise on the practicability of establishing a bilingual dramatic school in Canada, and before he reaches Toronto will have attended the Dominion Drama Festival finals in Halifax and paid brief visits to Quebec City, Montreal and Ottawa. During that time Mr. Saint-Denis is in Toronto the whole position will be reviewed. We feel we are most fortunate in obtaining Mr. Saint-Denis' advice as he is one of the world's foremost experts on dramatic training in both English and French.<sup>45</sup>



## The 1958 Visit

Saint-Denis' visit to Canada in the spring of 1958 ultimately included, in addition to the DDF events and the scheduled School planning meetings, meetings with Governor-General Vincent Massey, Canada Council head A.W. Trueman, and numerous press conferences and interviews. Jean Pelletier, a Quebecois journalist and politician,<sup>46</sup> accompanied him to a meeting with Abbé Levesque, a Quebec member of the Canada Council, which Robin Patterson thought was "extremely important"<sup>47</sup> to getting the Council on board.

The interest in having Saint-Denis attached to the Canadian initiative by this point was enormous. In Montreal, Saint-Denis also did a radio lecture and an interview on French TV. Playwright Gratien Gélinas insisted on a meeting between Saint-Denis and director Pere Legault. In Stratford, he met with Michael Langham and the entire Stratford Board of Directors. The visit was well-planned.

For the DDF, Saint-Denis gave a lecture on May 14 on "Theatre Direction in its Relationship with the Play and the Actors," and spoke at a luncheon to a full auditorium of DDF executives. There, he expressed his belief that Canada needed a school which placed the two linguistic traditions under one roof but which would also develop a versatile artist. He noted that the Conservatoire d'art dramatique did exist in Quebec, and that it was working only in French. As well, there was still no national professional theatre training school in English-speaking Canada and certainly none which aimed to bring both cultures together in any way.

Saint-Denis commented on his impressions of the Canadian theatre he had seen and on the development of DDF productions since his first adjudication in 1937 (assuring that the Canadian theatre had been improving steadily, but reminding his listeners that something fundamental was missing). "[N]othing has shown to me up to now that the majority of you had a

burning desire to become professionals.”<sup>48</sup> To Saint-Denis, there was talent in Canada but it still needed

[t]raining for everybody, for the amateurs as well as for the professionals; when I say training for the amateurs what I mean is this: when we look at your work in detail one can guess that some of your difficulties are probably with direction, that probably advice on direction and not theoretical advice, advice by ...practice, by direct advice; one also finds that the speech, the voices, the way to tackle the language is not always as good as it could be, and one wishes for an improvement in those lines which means....training.... To speak one must train and the greatest actors go on training and learning how to breathe the whole of their lives. So that must be clear. And that training must be organized....<sup>49</sup>

Acknowledging the ongoing cultural struggle between the French and the English, he suggested finding a middle ground so that both traditions could be exchanged to create a unique Canadian style.

....I don't see any need for you to torture yourself about trying to be more Canadian than you are...one must not be frightened, one must not try to be more national than nationalism, one must be happy to be what one is, confident in one's own strength and then ready to open arms to the people who want honesty...I will always be happy to exchange ideas and to confront my own views with yours.<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, Saint-Denis was addressing what seemed to be a deep-rooted fear in Canada<sup>51</sup>—the fear of losing, or failing to recognize one's own identity.

One of those present to hear Saint-Denis was playwright John Coulter. A few days later, he wrote to Saint-Denis, saying he agreed with him on the issue of nationalism. “I dislike it too, in the gross political sense.”<sup>52</sup> Yet Coulter also wrote that “nationalism, in an artistic sense, has important virtues,”<sup>53</sup> noting Saint-Denis' own theatre background as an example.

All the great theatres—Copeau's, the Moscow, the original Abbey, even the New York Group, were first of all intensely of their own country. And all the great plays were first of all regional plays. By the very depth of their roots in their own soil they flowered out internationally.... It doesn't condone the worked-up, self-conscious, to-hell-with-foreigners feeling that you were condemning.<sup>54</sup>

Saint-Denis responded.

[N]aturally I agree with what you say in your letter. It only seems to me that too much worry about being Canadian at all costs, even in the writing of plays, may not be conducive to originality. It must come and be said from outside and from inside at the same time.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, Saint-Denis was suggesting Canadians not focus on “nationalism” in the theatre, but instead to inform themselves with traditions that make up their national identity, what Postlewait calls their “artistic heritage,” which would allow for a unique Canadian style in the theatre to emerge on its own.

In Toronto, Saint-Denis would finally get “down to brass tacks”<sup>56</sup> as to whether he felt a school was possible or not. On May 21 at the University of Toronto’s Victoria College, some 70 to 80 people came together to discuss the issue with him. Among them were many who had been pushing the issue for years: Lady Eaton, Pauline McGibbon, J.J. Vaughan, W.E. Scully, Herbert Whittaker, Eva Langboard, and, of course, Tom and Robin Patterson. Saint-Denis made it clear from the beginning that he was not putting himself forward as a Director of the School. Rather, he reiterated a point he made to Stratford Festival Artistic Director Michael Langham earlier: “I feel concerned by the situation in Canada...but I don’t want to interfere with anything or anybody. My only good intention is to help.”<sup>57</sup>

Pauline McGibbon later acknowledged that Saint-Denis had only said that “if Canadians did move to form a school, he would be most happy to supply advice and guidance.”<sup>58</sup> His main goal seemed to be simply to outline the premises on which such a school—specific to Canada—should be formed. Yes, he had his own approaches to training, but he insisted that even they should be adapted to Canadian conditions. Most consistent in his position was that such a school should be national and bilingual, the latter defined on May 21 as being

in the same building forming the two languages into their own tradition before you begin to mix. The two sections should remain separated until strengthened. They should live together, meet, exchange ideas—each tradition should be in touch with each other. The moment you bring in language you bring in tradition.<sup>59</sup>

He also stressed that the School should be completely independent from government.

After the May 21 meeting, a Steering Committee—an executive group of sorts—was formed consisting of Pauline McGibbon (Chair), Robert Gill, Eva Langbord, W.E.Scully, Jack Brockie, Sterndale Bennett, Jean Pelletier, Gratien Gélinas, Murray Davis, Barry Morse, Malcolm Black, Mavor Moore, Al Saxe, and Tom Brown. The train was slowly moving forward.

## **Getting Others on Board**

The idea of getting the appropriate people involved to plan the School was, from the beginning, a major concern. With the success of the Stratford Festival, the name of Tyrone Guthrie—a former colleague of Saint-Denis’ from the Old Vic—came to mind for many as a potential participant in its planning. Roy Stewart for one wrote Saint-Denis and brought Guthrie’s name up. Stewart noted that for Stratford, “...he fitted right.... I can say Tyrone Guthrie helped Stratford in a way few people could.”<sup>60</sup> Saint-Denis responded that while he admired Guthrie’s “brilliance and ability to bring success to what he touches,” he doubted “if Tony Guthrie would fit” since the primary goal was to be education and training which were not Guthrie’s strong suits.

Robin Patterson, for her part, questioned the DDF’s continuing involvement with what was to be a professional school. In a letter to Saint-Denis, she asked how and to what extent the DDF would be involved.

There are quite a number of us now trying to think of the best ways... to channel the interest. The Canada Council has stated on several occasions that it is not its policy to initiate or to ‘superimpose’ any project, but rather to encourage when the lead has been given, and the demand is evident. The number of Canadians going abroad to study and the number of verbal and written comments we (and others) have received since announcing that you may come to Canada, underline that the demand exists.<sup>61</sup>

Robin Patterson was not just speaking for herself when she said "...the CTC might be the instrument through which the professional interests in Canada could best be co-ordinated...."<sup>62</sup> She was particularly concerned that having DDF people on the Committee was not the best strategy in the establishment of a professional institution, a concern that remained present throughout the whole NTS planning process. "The professional people are keen to see that the school should not get into amateur hands. Everyone feels that the DDF should be part of the committee, but that they should not control it."<sup>63</sup>

Saint-Denis was probably torn by this issue given his own connections to the DDF. He said continuously that any such school "must serve Canadian needs and relate...to... improvement of amateur theatre and serve professional theatre."<sup>64</sup> To distinguish between the DDF and CTC while also recognizing the significance of both organizations in relation to the School, his solution was to "...clarify [the] relation between [a] professional school and amateur theatre," and to "counteract any bad feeling against 'amateur' and [to] clear up [the] relationship with [the] DDF."<sup>65</sup> Clearly, he and the planners needed to keep the DDF reps—McGibbon and Stewart—happy.

The need for funding also emerged at this point in time. Robin Patterson told Saint-Denis that even some modest financial support early on would attract more help from individuals and organizations.

[I]f we had some [funds] in the bank and formed a foundation of some kind, then the whole idea would seem more concrete to the business people, the Canada Council and certainly yourself. There is no point in you coming here unless the idea is beyond the mere talking stage. I know that you can inspire and direct 'them' whoever 'they' might be, and set the wheels really in motion.<sup>66</sup>

She also reported to Saint-Denis on the planners' many activities after he had returned to France.

[W]e called together a number of people vitally interested in Canadian theatre...There was a great deal of enthusiasm from everyone. It was an accepted fact that the need of the school was there. There was a strong hope that you would

be connected with it. There was also a strong will to work and make it possible. Various committees were formed to work on the bi-lingual problems, possible means of financing the school, needs from the curriculum point-of-view....<sup>67</sup>

By June 12, the Steering Committee officially became the School's Pro-Tem Committee with Roy Stewart as President, Pauline McGibbon as First Vice President, Whittaker as Second Vice President, and Robin Patterson as Secretary-Treasurer. Clearly the DDF was in a strong position.

As it was later stated in a draft of the NTS Blueprint, "[t]he Pro-Tem Committee was considered to be a committee of private and interested individuals, in no way representative of any group or organization."<sup>68</sup> But as the DDF-heavy Committee started to realize the long-term costs involved, McGibbon wrote to Saint-Denis admitting to him that confidence in the project was beginning to waver a bit. Fundraising became key at this point.

Correspondence between Saint-Denis and DDF-Quebec advisor Jean Pelletier confirms that there were uncertainties at this time about whether the process could continue without Saint-Denis' presence in Canada. Pelletier admitted that he felt the discussion stage was dragging on for too long—potentially numbing the plans—and that they needed to begin doing rather than talking. He said that he himself was ready to get involved directly in getting Quebec support for the School.<sup>69</sup>

On August 6, Saint-Denis responded to Pelletier with a note acknowledging the specific activities of the Pro-Tem Committee he had heard about from Pauline McGibbon and Robin Patterson. He said he was confident there would be no delays in the work.<sup>70</sup> McGibbon had already pointed out to him that "[t]o carry us through the doldrums of summer it was recognized that we needed a person to keep enthusiasm and interest alive,"<sup>71</sup> and that Tom Patterson was the one chosen to hold it together.

Through the summer, the Committee went into action. Tom Patterson was specifically asked to write a full report on both the location of the School and funding for it. Yves Bourassa,

as the President of the DDF, and Pelletier would look into issues on the French side. The Committee hoped that Patterson would have a report ready by September so that the planners could form a more permanent structure.

On August 30, the newly-formed Canadian Theatre Centre met in Stratford. Among those at the meeting were Mavor Moore (Chair), Florence James, Sydney Risk, Richard McDonald, Donald Davis, Jean-Louis Roux, Jean Gascon, David Ongley (Honorary Solicitor), and Dennis Sweeting (Secretary). Moore formally made the proposed School a key agenda item by tabling a motion urging the Canadian Theatre Centre be as involved “as possible in assisting the [school] organization.”<sup>72</sup> The minutes of the meeting are important in showing the Canadian Theatre Centre clearly as the professional side of the planning.

In fact, Jean-Louis Roux of the CTC’s Quebec wing had already met with Peter Dwyer of the Canada Council and he too was continuing to push the matter. In the minutes, Sweeting said he felt prospects for the School were “reasonably optimistic.”<sup>73</sup> By the end of the discussions, the Canadian Theatre Centre formally voted to support the establishment of a “National Bilingual School of Theatre Arts.”<sup>74</sup> Now two groups were on-side—the professionally-oriented Canadian Theatre Centre and the DDF-oriented Pro-Tem Committee.

Indeed, at this point, Pelletier told Saint-Denis that there was somewhat of an urgent need to see that the planning group consisted of representatives from all provinces and the two Canadian cultures.<sup>75</sup> Gratien Gélinas was quickly added to the Pro-Tem Committee. Both Committees now waited for Patterson’s report and bilingualism as an issue was rearing its head on both sides.

By year’s end, Saint-Denis wrote formally to Stratford to say that he would not accept the directing position with the Canadian Players. He told the company’s Director, Dennis Sweeting,

that the decision was a practical one. “If I was so long in giving my answer for the Canadian Players,” he wrote,

it is only because our previous conversations made me hesitate and I wanted to do everything to be free. I withdrew finally when I had to realize how late I was with my present, autumn and winter, commitments: a book on Jacques Copeau and another book about my three schools, for which I received a Rockefeller grant... Add to this a tour of lectures planned and fortunately not yet firm for October-November 1959 and you see in what difficulty I found myself. I could not have felt free, and the work would not have been good; it is worse than ever to present mediocre work, when the best is expected of you... I hope that in these conditions my attitude will appear justified. I would like you to believe that I want to direct the Canadian Players in the future, if you are still ready to entrust me with the work.<sup>76</sup>

He added, “I had to concentrate on my work for the Juilliard School and at the same time on the preliminary study I am pursuing in Canada in view of the establishment of a School there.”<sup>77</sup>

## **Antony Ferry**

In April of 1959, a new player emerged among those interested in getting such a school going when independent producer Antony Ferry contacted Saint-Denis asking if he would become a patron and supporter of a new theatre school—the Theatre Centre in Toronto (unrelated to the Canadian Theatre Centre). Ferry and actor Powys Thomas (Thomas had earlier worked with Saint-Denis in England) were planning to open their own school later that year to offer amateur actors a training program. Ferry, brimming with self-confidence, believed the Ferry-Thomas school could itself become the national school. Ferry wrote to Saint-Denis: “I wish to ask you...to become a patron of the Centre, and would be grateful to have you write to me to this effect.”<sup>78</sup> Ferry attached a promotional brochure for the school. In response, Saint-Denis wrote,

I found the ideas as exposed in your booklet very valuable, and I feel familiar with them. In your booklet, under the title ‘A Dual Concept,’ it is stated that [this] ‘...is an interim step pending the formation of a National School of Drama in Canada. It



does not claim to fulfill all the official requirements of such a School, nor does it wish to. But until the deliberations of the Committee which has been set up nationally to study the project bear fruit, [your school can be] constituted to do valuable ground-work.' This is a very clear declaration. You add to it that [yours] is not simply a school, but that it operates 'on the dual concept of School plus working company'....I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, I believe, and I am very anxious to meet all the people....I appreciate the fact that you ask me to become a patron of the Centre. You will understand that... I would prefer to have time to talk to you before accepting.<sup>79</sup>

In suggesting that Ferry's proposal was missing some fundamental and organizational aspects for establishing a professional theatre school, Saint-Denis was clearly hesitant to immediately accept or show interest in Ferry's ideas, especially since he was unacquainted with him and his work. It was also made clear that while Saint-Denis found Ferry's "dual concept" had merit, Saint-Denis was already an advisor to the Pro-Tem Committee which had done too much work to be ignored.

Saint-Denis then wrote to Roy Stewart, asking him in a "confidential"<sup>80</sup> letter for any information he might have on Ferry and his school. He pointed out "...the tone of his letter... shows very good feelings towards me, but at the same time is aggressive."<sup>81</sup> Saint-Denis said,

[t]heir booklet does not convince me, and I have doubts about the abilities of some members of the staff....I feel in all that we are being pushed into an association which may prove finally all right, but we must be given the time to know them and to make our own decision. I do not like this pressure nor the way in which it is applied to us.<sup>82</sup>

Saint-Denis also said that he planned to write to both Thomas and Ferry, and that while he was not going to completely reject the request, he would ask them for more time to consider it. "What worried me most," said Saint-Denis,

were some of the curriculum and the composition of the staff, either because I don't know them or because I know some of them, and am not confident, without further investigation in any case, that they can carry out the work announced. Also, they come from many different theatrical milieu or different countries, and I cannot be sure there will be unity in the training.<sup>83</sup>

On May 1, and again on May 5, Saint-Denis wrote to Powys Thomas saying that it was clearly their own decision to choose whoever they wanted to run the Centre. He also added some pointed political advice for the future.

you should be the head of the school if you consider that it is what you want to do, and if you yourself feel that you are able to do it. I think you are from the point of view of knowledge and talent, but you must be ready to face many political difficulties in the kind of world in which you move [at Ferry's school]. Confidentially...I was surprised that you were only in that scheme teaching for two hours a week, and that nowhere was it mentioned who was going to direct the whole Centre. Confidentially again, I must add that I don't very much like the aggressive tone of the booklet nor the tone of Mr. Ferry's letter.<sup>84</sup>

Within a short time, the Ferry-Thomas project moved into 47 Fraser Avenue in Toronto and was renamed the Fraser Avenue Theatre Centre, with Powys Thomas as its primary administrator. Thomas, who would ultimately have a long career at both the National Theatre School and Stratford, also began pushing Saint-Denis to have their Centre involved in the NTS planning, offering a space for the development of a national and “eventually a bi-lingual school.”<sup>85</sup> Saint-Denis once more declined to be involved. Ultimately, for Saint-Denis, it was not reasonable to link a national theatre school to an unrecognized organization.

On May 11, Thomas wrote back to Saint-Denis, agreeing that bringing their Centre into the NTS equation would be premature since it had yet to prove itself. Thomas also admitted that he was not, in fact, ready to be a leader of such a school and handle the politics of which Saint-Denis warned. Instead, he said simply he would try working at the Fraser Avenue Centre—“where there is not enough money, but where there is freedom and an unselfish enthusiasm to create something.”<sup>86</sup> Thomas also noted that Ferry was already planning to withdraw from the project and leave his job totally to Thomas. He added that Ferry was very critical of the current state of Canadian theatre and believed that a school was absolutely necessary for its improvement. He apologized for Ferry's not so nuanced tone, “something which neither you nor

I can really understand or appreciate. But it is the language of Canada and they seem to understand.”<sup>87</sup>

Saint-Denis eventually did meet Ferry and Ferry wrote Saint-Denis afterward thanking him for his time and “frank expression of opinion.”<sup>88</sup> Eventually, Thomas revealed that he and Ferry had themselves broken contact and that the school had not proved a success—mostly through bad management. “So he is out of our picture.”<sup>89</sup> Pauline McGibbon later commented, “Mr. Ferry successfully cooked his own goose by writing a blast against Stratford, Ontario, titled something like ‘Why I have never visited Stratford.’ Powys immediately withdrew from his school.”<sup>90</sup>

With the Ferry-Thomas initiative finally eliminated, planning by the Pro-Tem Committee proceeded even more quickly. Saint-Denis and his wife Suria already agreed to come to Toronto the following spring to adjudicate the DDF Finals from May 18 to 23, 1959. He was pleased to be “the first one to be called to adjudicate the Festival for the fourth time and terribly glad at the idea of finding myself with you all once more.”<sup>91</sup> More importantly, Saint-Denis realized that his return as adjudicator meant he could continue to “push...the school plan.”<sup>92</sup>

### **From Pro-Tem to Pilot**

On May 15, a few days prior to Saint-Denis’ arrival in Canada, the Pro-Tem Committee recognized the greater role of the Canadian Theatre Centre as “a ready-made national association of the professional, educational, and amateur theatre of Canada, which by charter was constituted to accept funds to promote the advancement of the professional and educational theatre in Canada.”<sup>93</sup> Essentially, the School was put into its hands. From this point on the DDF’s role was severely reduced.

On May 19, with Saint-Denis now in the country, the executive of the Canadian Theatre Centre—Donald Davis, Mavor Moore, Tom Patterson, Jean-Louis Roux, and David Ongley—agreed to undertake that responsibility and set up a legal structure for the School. The CTC executive “made it clear that as soon as it is possible” it would take over all activities as a “permanent corporate governing body,”<sup>94</sup> and run the School. Setting up the structure of the School quickly became the CTC’s priority. Acknowledging the School to be “[o]ne of the greatest needs in Canada,” its goal was nothing less than the establishment of “a national theatre school for the training of actors, designers, directors, and technicians for careers in the professional theatre.”<sup>95</sup> Obviously, the DDF was all but out of the picture.

The CTC Pilot Committee was to move the project forward. Its plan was, according to the surviving document:

1. To meet with Michel Saint-Denis while he is in Toronto to obtain his specific recommendations in writing as to the scope, structure, and format of the school, to obtain any suggestions he may have on such matters as costs, fees, scholarships, etc. It is clearly understood of course, the training to be given in such school is to be in both French and English....
2. The preparation of a [financial] Brief to the Canada Council, based upon all facts collated,
3. The establishment of a fundraising Committee on as wide a national basis as possible for the purpose of raising the minimum funds required in the establishment of the school.
4. Immediate consideration and investigation of possible suitable physical locations for the school in Toronto and of persons to be appointed as Administrator and Artistic Director or Artistic Directors, as well as for teachers in the Dramatic Arts.
5. The immediate establishment of liaison with persons actively engaged or interested in the Dramatic Arts in French speaking Canada.<sup>96</sup>

Gratien Gélinas of Montreal was named President of the CTC with Donald Davis of Toronto as Vice-President, as well as Chairman of the Pilot Committee. Davis was determined to win the School for Toronto. Other members of the CTC Pilot group would include Moore,

McGibbon, Whittaker, Vincent Tovell, and Powys Thomas. Saint-Denis met twice with the Pilot Committee, on May 31 and June 3. At the next Canadian Theatre Centre meeting in Stratford on July 25, Davis tabled a report confirming that plans were moving ahead. The report included a recommendation that Powys Thomas be Director of the School.

As the work progressed, the earlier DDF-heavy Pro-Tem Committee dissolved itself in favour of the CTC's professionally-dominated Pilot Committee. Saint-Denis tried not to take sides and once more reiterated that his role was simply to be an advisor to the project, specifying that "his opinions and viewpoints were entirely personal and consequently were to be adapted to the local requirements...he was acting only as a consultant and...he would not be able to proceed himself to the practical establishment of the school."<sup>97</sup> Eventually, David Gardner was elected Chairman of the Pilot Committee with Tom Patterson and Yves Bourassa taking a more active role.

The following chapter will look closely at how the Pilot Committee pursued its work in terms of legal structures, as well as the proposed aspects of the School relating to bilingualism, location, and funding, elements dealt with at length in Tom Patterson's report. The chapter will also look at the financial approaches made to federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of “CBC Talk on Canadian Culture”, 1953, 2, R4939-0-2-E, Robertson Davies Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Betty Lee, *Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*, (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1973), 170.

<sup>4</sup> “Brief of the Governors of the Dominion Drama Festival,” by D. Park Jamieson and H. Alan Skinner, August 12, 1949, 3, F0453, Herbert Whittaker Fonds, Clara Thomas and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Pauline McGibbon, [Sound Recording], n.d., R5415-0-1-E, Theatre Canada Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>6</sup> Both terms—“co-lingual” and “bi-lingual”—are used within correspondence between Committee members and in meeting minutes, and would have an effect on how the School’s planning Committee would approach the establishment of the School. While it was understood that the term “bi-lingual” at the time, in the case of the NTS, meant the equal representation of English and French within one building, the term “co-lingual” tended to be used to highlight the separation between the two languages, emphasizing the distinction and autonomy of each of the two cultures.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Pauline McGibbon, [Sound Recording].

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Whittaker, “Show Business: St. Denis Adjudicates Festival Finals: A Cue Canada’s Theatre Musn’t Miss,” *Globe and Mail*, March 15, 1952, 8, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1287249922/B60A969603F24D01PQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>9</sup> Roy Stewart, letter to Michel Saint-Denis, 17 June, 1952, 1, F0453, Herbert Whittaker Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>10</sup> On June 3, 1952, Roy Stewart wrote to Whittaker saying that playwright Herman Voaden was not in favour of Saint-Denis, yet no follow-up letter consisting of an explanation regarding Voaden’s views was found in any archive.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart, letter to W.G. Palmer, June 3 1952, 1, Herbert Whittaker Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, 17 June, 1952, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> According to Whittaker, Saint-Denis was also offered to work in Lille, France, which he planned to do since he hoped to be involved in at least one more project in his home country. The project, however, fell through (*Globe and Mail*, “St. Denis Chooses France—But Canadians Got the Vision,” 8).

<sup>17</sup> Pauline McGibbon and David Gardner, “A Step by Step History of the Founding of a Canadian School of Dramatic Art,” n.d., 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Whittaker, “Show Business: St. Denis Chooses France—But Canadians Got the Vision,” *Globe and Mail*, August 9, 1952, 8, accessed March 13, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1356065954/41B3A9B8AD81432APQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>20</sup> Whittaker commented on the irony that NTS opened before the Juilliard Drama Division in New York. It was Saint-Denis' work in the U.S. which allowed him to reconnect with the people with whom he would establish the Canadian school ("National Theatre School Roots," 1975, 1).
- <sup>21</sup> David Gardner, letter to Elizabeth Leese, August 10, 1956, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>22</sup> Robin Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, January 16, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>23</sup> Though no specific details were found in the archives as to what kind of connection Saint-Denis meant, he could have been suggesting that the Canadian Players be a theatre company attached to the School.
- <sup>24</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, November 25, 1957, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>26</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Robin Patterson, December 6, 1957, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>27</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, December 19, 1957, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- <sup>29</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Patterson, December 31, 1957, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, January 16, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>32</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Patterson, December 31, 1957, 1.
- <sup>33</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Richard McDonald, December 31, 1957, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, December 11, 1957, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>36</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Stewart, December 31, 1957, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Pauline McGibbon, December 31, 1957, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>39</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, January 12, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>40</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Patterson, January 24, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Patterson, telegram to Saint-Denis, March 15, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- <sup>44</sup> Mavor Moore, letter to Saint-Denis, March 12, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

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- <sup>45</sup> Patterson, letter to Moore, May 14, 1958, 1, F0359, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.
- <sup>46</sup> An exchange of letters between Pelletier and Saint-Denis from late April to early May that year reveals continuing concerns about finances. A letter dated April 25 shows that Pelletier offered to pay for Saint-Denis' travel expenses, to which Saint-Denis replied on May 7, "Don't worry. You won't have any transport to pay, as my traveling expenses are covered by my general budget. I do not want to weigh on your budget."
- <sup>47</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, n.d., 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>48</sup> Speech by Saint-Denis, "Professional Theatre in Canada," [Sound Recording], 1958, R5415-0-1-E, Theatre Canada Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Saint-Denis was likely referring to the growing cultural politics of the time—that is, the struggle of Canada's English and French cultures to maintain their own distinct identities.
- <sup>52</sup> John Coulter, letter to Saint-Denis, May 26, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Coulter, May 30, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>56</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, n.d., 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>57</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Michael Langham, May 7, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>58</sup> McGibbon and Gardner, "A Step By Step History," 2.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, December 11, 1957, 5-6, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>61</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, January 16, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>63</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, February 3, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>64</sup> Meeting Minutes, "Meeting With Michel Saint-Denis," May 22, 1958, R4750-0-5-E, David Gardner Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, April 24, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>68</sup> "Historical Development of the Canadian School of Dramatic Art," *A Plan for the Establishment of the National Theatre School of Canada*, February 8, 1960, 67-68, David Gardner Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.
- <sup>69</sup> Jean Pelletier, letter to Saint-Denis, July 11, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, National Theatre School of Canada.



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- <sup>70</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Pelletier, August 6, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>71</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, July 9, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>72</sup> Meeting Minutes, "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Theatre Centre," August 30, 1958, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>75</sup> Pelletier, letter to Saint-Denis, November 4, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>76</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Dennis Sweeting, December 7, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Antony Ferry, letter to Saint-Denis, April 29, 1959, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>79</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Ferry, May 5, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>80</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Stewart, May 2, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>84</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Powys Thomas, May 5, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>86</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, May 11, 1959, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>88</sup> Ferry, letter to Saint-Denis, May 19, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>89</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, August 15, 1959, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>90</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, August 17, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>91</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to MacDonald, October 14, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>92</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to McGibbon, August 5, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>93</sup> "Historical Development of the Canadian School of Dramatic Art," 70.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., 71.
- <sup>95</sup> "The Establishment of 'The Canadian School of Dramatic Art—l'Ecole Canadienne d'Art Dramatique," n.d., 5, David Gardner Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
- <sup>96</sup> David Ongley, letter to Stewart, May 21, 1959, 3-4, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

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<sup>97</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 25, 1959, 8, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

# Chapter Three

## The Big Issues: Bilingualism, Location, and Funding (1958-1959)

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### A Brief Chronology

#### 1958

- May. Lady Flora Eaton finances a visit by Saint-Denis to Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto to discuss the proposed national theatre School with the Pilot Committee.
- May 21. A meeting is held with Saint-Denis in Toronto to discuss details of the new school.
- May 22. Saint-Denis tells CBC television that planning for a national theatre school of Canada is well under way.
- September. Tom Patterson submits his commissioned study to the Pilot Committee.

#### 1959

- January 21. The Committee meets (without any francophone members in attendance) to discuss the Patterson Report.
  - April. Saint-Denis returns to Canada to do a CBC-Radio talk about directing and to attend the DDF Finals in Toronto.
  - May 31-June 3. Meetings take place with Saint-Denis to discuss location of the School and the issue of bilingualism.
  - July 25 and 26. The Pilot Committee recommends Powys Thomas as Director of the School. The School's bilingual mandate is confirmed.
  - August. Bourassa and Pelletier meet with Quebec government officials to discuss support for the project.
  - August 5. The Pilot Committee makes decision to open the School in September 1960. Powys Thomas is asked to create a curricular blueprint.
  - The idea of locating the School in both Montreal and Stratford begins to generate interest.
  - October 26. The Pilot Committee is told that there will be financial support from Quebec.
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This chapter examines how the planning of the School ultimately turned on three aspects: bilingualism, location, and funding. Previous histories of the NTS only note these aspects in passing, but Saint-Denis came to call them the School's "famous problems."<sup>1</sup> Understanding these issues in greater depth and placing them in context provides a deeper understanding of the

School's complex establishment and suggests that the original vision of a national theatre school in Canada was from the start a most precarious cultural endeavour.

The summer of 1958 was perhaps the most pivotal time for the new School. Saint-Denis' role by this point was more or less secured—he would only be an advisor though his own pedagogical vision for the School was palpable: it had to be an independent institution rooted in Vieux-Colombier<sup>2</sup> concepts, but influenced by Canadian conditions. It also had to be bilingual.

It is important to note here that by “bilingual,” the Pilot Committee was not implying that all students and teachers were required to be or become knowledgeable and fluent in both the English and French languages. Bilingualism, at the time of the School's establishment, referred historically simply to the co-existence of two cultures (two traditions with two different languages), as opposed to the idea of operating in a single cultural or linguistic context.<sup>3</sup> To put this in historical terms, *The Canadian Encyclopedia* states that bilingualism was created in Canada out of a need to “make legal and practical accommodations that will allow the two official language communities to preserve their cultural distinctiveness and at the same time pursue common goals.”<sup>4</sup>

The future National Theatre School was clearly attempting to exemplify this specific 1950s notion of bilingualism. More specifically, it would reflect the decade's idea of Institutional Bilingualism—that is, “the capacity of state institutions to operate in two languages [which]... should not be confused with a requirement that everyone be bilingual.”<sup>5</sup> As the Committee's own Brief on Bilingualism and Biculturalism submitted at this time to the Royal Commission stated, “bilingualism and bi-culturalism are unnatural phenomena which run counter to the personality of the average citizen. In any bilingual institution there will be constant pressures to revert to unilingualism.”<sup>6</sup> For this new School, however, great effort, as well as time and money, went in

to ensure the preservation, and also the co-existence, of both cultures under one roof. As the planners' Brief put it,

it was necessary, and would probably be beneficial, to concentrate the available human and financial resources from both language groups and all regions of the country in a single, national school. The school would provide training in both the English and French traditions. The confrontation of these traditions within a single institution should prove mutually stimulating and enriching. The school would not attempt to produce bilingual actors. The ability to speak a foreign language well enough to perform in it is exceptional, even among actors, and imposed bilingualism would hamper training in a student's mother tongue. Each student would be given a complete theatrical training in his own language and culture.<sup>7</sup>

To put a clear point on it, the purpose of the School was not to promote biculturalism, but to train actors, directors, and technicians,<sup>8</sup> yet the bilingual framework envisioned by the Pilot Committee would have immense influence on the objectives and structure of the School, including language, location, financing, curriculum, and faculty, aspects interdependent of one another that were also influenced by politics of the period.

On May 22, 1958, Saint-Denis gave a speech on CBC television in which he introduced and explained his own idea of a national theatre school in Canada.

That school in my view should be useful only if it is a completely Canadian school answering Canadian needs and not an imitation either of the Royal Academy in London or of the French Conservatoire because naturally that school, in my view, in all that I am suggesting, should be a bilingual school, addressing itself both to the French and to the English Canadians. And when I am asked what I mean by that, because it's not without presenting some difficulties, what I mean is that the two civilizations of traditions should work side by side without any confusion between the two. It's not a question of playing Molière when you are used to playing Shakespeare or to play Molière in a Shakespearean way. It is only a question of having the two traditions in contact with each other so that some good results should come through exchange and all that in the long run. Naturally, as I say I am only suggesting that for what seems to be the good of the theatre in Canada. And I think it should address itself both to the improvement of the amateur movement, which has made so much progress in twenty years, and to giving a basic ground to professionals. Now where should it be? I don't know. It's not for me to say that...we have a lot of talks at present with my Canadian friends in the theatre and I have had some talks in Quebec and in Montreal.... I'm going to see Stratford tomorrow....It is only when I have seen all that and I got to know

that I'll be able to give...some more precise advice. Until then, I'll just go on talking, looking, getting in touch with people, answering their criticism...and then we will have to hope for the best and see what practical conclusions will come, but the practical conclusions are not at present what I'm after. I'm still after general ideas, general plans, and I think the question should remain very open so that no useful concentration is missed. But it is my hope that one day I will be able to come back to give some more precise advice the day the national school is ready to function.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that while Saint-Denis was clearly stating his vision for the School, he was also clarifying his position as advisor to the planning Committee, suggesting that though he was invited for his professional and international expertise to help Canadians establish a co-lingual school, he was willing to advise only so much.<sup>10</sup>

In his May 24, 1958 *Globe and Mail* article, Herbert Whittaker acknowledged the issues that the Canadian School was going to have to face, comparing it to Saint-Denis' own work with the Juilliard school in New York.

The problems of setting up a school here are quite different, for many reasons, than they will be in the United States. The bi-lingual aspect presents one, in staff as in location, the financial support presents another, the whole organization—'affiliated with both the amateur and the better professional theatres but separate from them'—presents yet a third. But these questions must be answered, and now.... The chance to draw on the inspiration of a man like Michel St. Denis whose particular genius of theatre concerns itself with the training of theatre people is very rare. We must seize our opportunities now or handicap the full development of our theatre for an indefinite period.<sup>11</sup>

As suggested by Whittaker, the dependency on Saint-Denis' bilingual background was apparent, not only because he was fluent in both languages, but because it was believed by all that he could raise the quality and standards of the Canadian theatre while accommodating both cultures and traditions.

Not everyone agreed, however, that these ideas could work. Another *Globe and Mail* writer, L.D. Court, wrote in a May 30 article that a functioning professional theatre was more

urgently needed than a school and that the public should not be focused on supporting a school that would eventually graduate students into a workplace without real theatre.

I have been reading with interest of the proposal that we should start in Canada a National Theatre School and of the recent visit of M. Michel St. Denis in this connection. I have noted that M. St. Denis has been very cautious in his statements, that he has made no concrete proposals at all, that his visit has been merely exploratory. I also note that your theatre correspondent, on these very flimsy foundations, is already erecting, or is proposing that the public should contribute funds in order to erect a theatre school for the training of actors and actresses. I suggest that the reason for M. St. Denis' caution is his realization that a theatre school cannot exist in a vacuum.<sup>12</sup> How on earth are the graduates of this hypothetical school to earn a living at their chosen profession in this country? With all respect in the world to our friends at the Crest Theatre, Stratford and the various Montreal groups, can they be expected to support an influx of new talent? Can the CBC Drama Department, for all its high standards and excellent workmanship, give more employment to actors and actresses than it is doing now? And, if all these organizations do put themselves out to provide employment for our graduates, are they to do it at the expense of the current crop of players who, in the main, eke out a miserable living, barely above the subsistence level?<sup>13</sup>

“Let us approach this problem reasonably,” he added,

Surely setting up a theatre school before providing theatres in which the graduates can obtain work is putting the cart before the horse. I suggest most strongly that anyone who is approached to support the founding of a theatre school, financially or otherwise, should reject the proposition out of hand. I suggest even more strongly that anyone who is approached to help found a theatre should give that help with all the power at his command. This is the natural order of events—first a strong and independent theatre; then, and only then, a school to provide trained talent.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Whittaker, who believed Saint-Denis' return to Canada was a sign he took great interest in helping the Canadian theatre, Court believed the opposite was true, suggesting that Saint-Denis was in fact showing disinterest and a lack of commitment in the project, all because of what he saw as the undeveloped state of the Canadian theatre. Clearly, there was ongoing and wide debate over the necessity and role of a national theatre school in Canada. For some, the Canadian theatre needed a bilingual school to help develop a unique Canadian style of high standards. For others, the idea of a theatre school was premature.

Obviously, at that point, the planning Committee also had a public relations job to do as well. But could the planning Committee reconcile its own members' divergent views as they seriously considered the state of the Canadian theatre as 1960 approached?

## **Awaiting the Patterson Report**

As soon as the planning Committee decided that the School would be bilingual, other aspects of the School had to be approached with both the English and French cultures and languages in mind. "This is Canada and this is how it should be..."<sup>15</sup> said Yves Bourassa. This, it was argued, would allow the organic development of a bi-cultural style of theatre unique to Canada.

The school shall be absolutely bilingual: i.e. under one roof, there shall be in fact, two schools....There would be in this way of handling things great advantages. The main one would be that the students, while receiving a training in the line of the tradition which their culture has assigned them, would get enriched by keeping close to another tradition and another culture. But there would be also serious dangers. The main one would be that a student, rather than getting enriched by keeping close to another tradition and another culture, would be so much impressed by the other culture that he would abandon his own tradition and culture. One shall be constantly vigilant in order to put a check to such a danger; otherwise the school would not achieve its objects.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, because there was already a Conservatoire d'art dramatique operating in French with branches in Montreal and Quebec City (it opened in Montreal in 1954 and in Quebec in 1958),<sup>17</sup> the necessity for the School to work in French was questioned by some. According to Robin Patterson, even Committee members Jean Gascon and Gratien Gélinas felt that the bilingualism aspect should not be a factor in establishing a national school. In a letter to Saint-Denis in April 1958, Robin Patterson wrote, in fact, that Gascon and Gélinas did not believe "that the bilingual aspect is...necessary for them as there is a good school at the conservatoire."<sup>18</sup> But, she added,



the school we have in mind will not conflict I'm sure. I have not had the opportunity to discuss it with them but I feel that you are the one to convince them that they should get behind this move. If the school is of the caliber we are all working for, the students will come!<sup>19</sup>

Saint-Denis wrote back to Robin Patterson simply saying that more information on the Conservatoire was obviously needed.<sup>20</sup>

The subject of location of the School came up at a meeting in Toronto on May 21, 1958. This became one of the most arduous conversations about the School. It was clear that the School's location had to be conducive to both anglophone and francophone students if it was to achieve its envisioned mandate.

At the end of his Canadian visit, Saint-Denis told Jean Pelletier that “[t]he question of location for the school has been discussed at full length...the discussion goes on to know whether it should be in Montreal, Toronto, or Ottawa...a lot more investigation should be carried out at all levels.”<sup>21</sup> During his time in Canada, Saint-Denis was approached by Tom Patterson suggesting having the School in Stratford,<sup>22</sup> but as Robin Patterson later confirmed, the Stratford Board of Governors themselves rejected the idea. They knew they could not really be in charge, said Robin Patterson, “they either take the lead or not [be involved] at all.”<sup>23</sup> Saint-Denis knew, however, that the School could not flourish as a bilingual institution in Stratford. “I do not believe that this could be done permanently, but only that some arrangement could be found...”<sup>24</sup> What Saint-Denis ultimately suggested was that the School hold some of its courses in Stratford during the summer months to expose students to English classics being produced by the Festival, an idea that would come up again and again. But even that notion, admitted Saint-Denis, was “received coldly by the [Stratford] governors who believe one is after their money...”<sup>25</sup>

Another obvious concern was funding, a subject Jean Pelletier brought up several times with Saint-Denis. Pelletier had also spoken with Pere Legault, who was interested in getting involved with the School, but who had also challenged the Canada Council's early spending patterns. Pelletier noted that it was spending \$250,000 on music and \$70,000 for the national ballet, and had asked "why not the same sum for theatre?"<sup>26</sup> Roy Stewart also wrote to Saint-Denis, saying he was himself not a fundraiser. "[W]hen it comes to raising money, I have no skill...."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, before any real decisions could be made, the Committee needed to know how to get support, and to get support, they needed to know how much it would all cost. Suddenly budgets became an issue.

## **The Patterson Report**

When the Steering Committee was formed in June 1958, they decided to bring Tom Patterson on board and to give him the responsibility of investigating and reporting on these various issues, especially finances, location, and "the problems of bilingualism."<sup>28</sup> The plan was to have him travel across Canada for a month over the summer to assess the attitudes and issues in both English and French Canada (with Jean Pelletier to help in Quebec). Roy Stewart provided Patterson with a précis of the Committee's previous discussions and directions, helped him get the time off from the Stratford Festival, and put together some modest funds for his travel expenses. According to Stewart, the estimated cost for the trip was to be between \$800 and \$900. Some \$1,300 was raised—\$400 from Stratford, \$500 from a Ms. Judith Finch, and \$100 (each) from Herbert Whittaker, Pauline McGibbon, Justice Carl Stewart, and the DDF.<sup>29</sup>

Saint-Denis was assured by McGibbon that the decision to go ahead with the summer plans proved the Committee was moving forward. "[I]f Tom gives the report by September, to

me it is as fast as can be,”<sup>30</sup> said Saint-Denis, who was pleased that it was Patterson chosen to investigate. To Jean Pelletier he wrote, “the arrangement is excellent.”<sup>31</sup>

It took a month longer than expected, but when Patterson’s Report did arrive in late September, the Committee found some surprises in it. Patterson began by noting that his conversations, specifically with leading theatrical people in eastern Canada, confirmed that

a first rate school of theatre is not only desirable in Canada, but has almost become a necessity....Up until now, it has been sufficient to draw upon foreign assistance, foreign plays, foreign technical help—and in many cases, foreign ideas for our theatre. This is especially applicable to the English-speaking theatre....At the same time, we are not yet in a position...when we become so nationalistic that we will take nothing but Canadian, be it good, bad, or indifferent. What we need is a welding of the two ideas. This cannot be done successfully if it is attempted on a hit and miss basis—summer courses, night school, etc. it can only be accomplished by a concentrated schooling period where the philosophy of the school is such that it will take into account not only the practical application of training—things like breath-control, mime, design, etc.—but will graduate students who have trained to use this practical knowledge as a unified whole to develop something which, we hope, become, on the stage, a true reflection of Canadian life.<sup>32</sup>

Patterson echoed the need for Canadians to reflect on what was necessary to find their own bi-cultural voice, making a number of suggestions starting with the location of the School. To the shock of some, notably Donald Davis, Patterson wrote:

The location of the school should be in Montreal. If it is to be bilingual and national, I cannot see it in any other city for the following reasons: To be truly bilingual, it must be located in an area where bilingualism is practiced, not only in an academic way, but in a practical everyday living; The school must be in a location where other theatre does exist if it is to be a ‘working’ school and not merely an academic ‘lecture hall’. Admittedly, Toronto has more theatre than Montreal, but there is not that much more to counteract the bilingual aspect; ...If it is to be truly national, such a school should give French-speaking students the opportunity to leave their own locales and live in English-speaking Canada. For this reason, it would seem a good idea to have a term, or a period of a term of the three year course spent in Ontario. This could be accomplished by having one term move from the headquarters of the school to a location in Ontario... I would like to suggest that a plan be worked out with the Stratford Festival whereby a particular class could come to Stratford for a period of several weeks at least once throughout the three or four year course, be employed in the wardrobe departments, receive lectures and direction from the leading people at

Stratford, sit in on rehearsals, etc., so that the students could get as broad a picture as possible of developments in Canadian artistic life, [including] trips from Stratford to Toronto with visits to the Royal Conservatory, Toronto Opera Company and the various theatres in Toronto...<sup>33</sup>

Should the planners really choose Toronto because it offered more theatre than Montreal? Would this really allow francophones to engage with the English-speaking theatre of which they would have otherwise been deprived? Or should the School be situated in Montreal where the idea of bilingualism was more likely to flourish? Patterson ultimately pushed for Montreal.

Patterson noted later in his Report that Pere Legault, with whom he met while in Quebec, actually suggested a potential building for the School on the outskirts of the city—a Dominican Monastery—which he believed would not be difficult to obtain for the School building. The Report also discussed the political and financial aspects of the School, suggesting Quebec’s support was likely unattainable since it was already backing the Conservatoire. He noted that given the situation, it all “takes on political over-tones.”<sup>34</sup> He also believed that getting the Quebec government involved would bring about other problems for the operation of the School.

There would be great difficulty in arriving at proportional figures for the various governments to donate; if the government gave, say two-fifths of the cost, they would expect to have two-fifths of the students; The whole foundation of the school would be too subject to the political changes, and therefore the changes in government in the various provinces.<sup>35</sup>

Patterson suggested some solutions for financing the School without the Quebec government’s help. He brought up “capital financing.”<sup>36</sup> He explained that if the Committee decided to purchase the aforementioned Dominican Monastery for the School, it could be done through a public campaign, noting that he did not think the cost would be too much and that such a campaign could be successful.<sup>37</sup>

As for financing the School’s operational expenses, rather than approaching the government,

[t]he plan is based on scholarships, with every student, no matter what his or her financial state, enrolled as a certain scholarship winner. In this way, the fee can be made as high or low as is required according to the budgeted operating cost. Let us assume that the cost for a year is \$90,000 (these figures are not realistic but are only used as examples). Let us also assume that the maximum number of students desirable is 45. We then simply divide 45 into \$90,000 and come up with a 'fee' of \$2,000. The next move, of course, is to find organizations, preferably national, who will underwrite one or more scholarships of \$2,000 each. Such scholarships could be given by industrial firms, foundations, businesses. If, at this stage, governmental departments wanted to contribute, they would also be free to do so—but would have no more say in the operation of the school than any other contributor.<sup>38</sup>

It was then noted that the Tyrone Guthrie Fund at Stratford, the Canada Council, and various charitable organizations should also be considered for the scholarships.

Patterson pointed out that his scholarship idea had three key benefits. First, School authorities would have more freedom to choose whomever they wanted as students solely based on talent and not on geography or financing influence. Second, it would be a relatively modest cost for donors. A donor could even have their name attached to a specific “national” scholarship<sup>39</sup> and the promotion attached would be continuing. “If a scholarship winner went on to become an important theatrical personality,” he wrote, “it would be carried in all programs and biographical notes that ‘so-and-so started their career as a John Doe Scholarship winner.’”<sup>40</sup> And finally, the potential donor could give a set amount of donations each year without feeling obliged to change the annual amount. Overall, he argued this was a simple one to operate with many advantages and emphasized that his suggestions not only offered a “sounder financial basis,”<sup>41</sup> but that they would also help in avoiding “this ticklish job from the field of politics.”<sup>42</sup>

According to Patterson, Saint-Denis was in agreement with what he was recommending and that they had already discussed it. “If plans in both the U.S. and Canada come to fruition...” Patterson added, “Saint-Denis would make himself available as a Consultant to both schools on a

more or less permanent basis, e.g., he would live in North America, dividing his time between the two countries for at least the first year and perhaps even longer.”<sup>43</sup>

## **The Push Back**

At first glance, Jean Pelletier found the Report “realistic.”<sup>44</sup> The rest of the Committee, however, saw it as “inadequate,”<sup>45</sup> particularly in relation to the assumptions about Quebec support. Indeed, the Committee members requested more evidence for his reasoning about francophone funding.

On November 4, Roy Stewart wrote,

there is some dissatisfaction...in the matter of documentation. Several have asked why we cannot get Government grants, and what would be wrong with them. There is a feeling that the report just does not contain enough information about the opposition of the Conservatoire and certain other matters mentioned.<sup>46</sup>

Stewart noted that if the Conservatoire was really opposed to a new school and their existence implied that government assistance from Quebec was not feasible, then “a location in Toronto may have to be considered.”<sup>47</sup> “It would not be ideal,” he wrote, “but there is a lot more theatre in Toronto than in Montreal.”<sup>48</sup>

The Committee at this point again started to consider Toronto as a possible location. However, even though financial assistance from the Province of Ontario seemed likely, the Committee felt it needed the support of both provincial governments. McGibbon and Gardner later wrote, “these questions of location and no governmental aid proved stumbling blocks and Mr. Patterson’s report was not adopted. The project of the National Theatre School hung fire for many months.”<sup>49</sup>

In preparation for a meeting in Toronto on January 21, 1959, Jean Pelletier was asked to investigate further on the Quebec side. Joining him were Yves Bourassa, Jean Gascon, and Jean-

Louis Roux. Neither Saint-Denis nor anyone from the Pelletier group attended the January meeting, which went on without them. Patterson's position was clear at the next meeting in March. As the minutes put it: "Tom ruled out the hope of getting financial aid from the Government of Quebec and expressed the opinion we should not try for any Government aid for setting up a school."<sup>50</sup>

The Toronto members of the Committee, according to Stewart in yet another letter to Saint-Denis, were

uniformly disappointed with his report... There was not factual data—he ruled out any financial help from the Quebec Government, discouraged any help from any Government. A lot of us just do not believe a public subscription can get a school just now. Over \$2,000,000 had been poured into [the] Stratford Festival building, largely by Ontario citizens, institutions, and Governments. There is a limit. Not everyone believes this way, I fancy, but I am no money raiser and could hold no hope without Government help. If the Quebec Government gives nothing, I am...quite sure Quebec citizens will give very little. The meeting discussed Tom's report with him—reiterated the necessity of resolving the bilingual aspect and thought nothing could be done until as many of the Toronto Committee as possible met with you and the French-Canadian members.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, Stewart was suggesting two important realizations: that government support was crucial in indicating the School's legitimacy to the public, and that at the crux of the financial problem was the underlying bi-cultural conflict.

By this point, it was clear that some were becoming dubious about whether the project was viable at any level. Saint-Denis wrote back to Stewart on March 3.

[Y]ou seem to be at a standstill... where the financial basis of the whole thing is concerned. I believe that, however, thanks to your taking the chairmanship, we have already gone a certain way towards knowing the difficulties of the scheme. Personally, I will not force it. When I am with you in Toronto, I will do my best to foster the idea further....<sup>52</sup>

Saint-Denis returned to Canada in April 1959 to do a CBC-Radio talk about directing. The planners met prior to his arrival, this time in Kingston. Stewart suggested they meet with Saint-Denis in Montreal "for the convenience of the Quebecers."<sup>53</sup> Jean Pelletier, however—the

only one to reply to Stewart's suggestion—advised that they should meet in Toronto where “tout le monde sera sur place”<sup>54</sup> for the 1959 DDF Festival.

The meeting was in fact held in Toronto. A group of Toronto members—Pauline McGibbon, Donald Davis, and Powys Thomas—gave a report at that meeting dated April 20. Their suggestions tried simply to keep the train on track: getting the Canadian Theatre Centre more involved, maintaining the idea of a bi-cultural location, and pushing harder for funding. Reframing the core argument, they wrote:

It is urged that such a School should be from the outset bi-lingual in nature—that is to say, that such a School should be equipped to train French-speaking students in the French tradition and English-speaking students in the English tradition, side by side in the same school. It is realized that the bi-lingual aspect of the School may require some time to reach its full development. However, it is most important that this primary function of the School should be borne in mind from the outset.<sup>55</sup>

They asked clearly, “M. St. Denis should be requested to serve in a full advisory capacity in all matters pertaining to the establishment of the school.”<sup>56</sup>

Roy Stewart wrote to Saint-Denis on April 26, suggesting there was growing tension. “I have felt for one year,” Stewart noted,

that if we waited for a school to be set up in Montreal— it would be a wait of many years—but, Michel—I could not speak out in the meeting when I had known you had declared so...firmly for Montreal— M. Duplessis makes difficulties in Quebec—I have felt for some time that we could get a school in Toronto—the money must and will come from Ontario. I am deeply worried too what Jean Pelletier et Yves Bourassa will think of me. I have a reputation, which I prize—thinking that French-speaking Canadians trust me. From my point of view, Michel, there was nothing cooked up about that meeting. I hope you and all French-speaking people will continue to trust me—I am really quite worried about this.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, the bilingual issue was beginning to compromise many people. In his response, Saint-Denis noted that a common ground among anglophones and francophones was needed. “It is



quite clear,” he wrote, “that once the bi-lingual problem has been examined, if there [are] agreements, it is for the Canadian people to suggest some solution, if they want the school.”<sup>58</sup>

Powys Thomas, in still another letter to Saint-Denis on April 30, argued for the School’s location to be in Toronto, emphatically pointing out that the national aspect of the School would be at risk if it was built in Montreal. “The French Canadians as a group,” he wrote,

tend to be rather self-centred in their interests, and any bilingual school situated in Montreal would tend to become solely a French Canadian school with an English course attached, as opposed to a bilingual school attempting to enrich the two traditions and cultures by their mutual contact. Would French Canadians come to Toronto to study? An open question... Certainly at this given moment theatrical life seems healthier in Montreal than in Toronto. However any growing ‘organism’ with its eyes on the future— such as a bilingual theatre school— would thrive better in Toronto. Certainly the museums, galleries, and libraries are better in Toronto than in Montreal. Montreal already has its ‘Conservatoire’— whatever it’s worth— and would not another school be inviting antagonism? However a French dramatic school in Toronto would scarcely be regarded with feelings of rivalry by Montreal.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas, while implying a critical opinion toward Quebec and the French-speaking community, also addressed the potential political ramifications of setting up a school in Quebec while Duplessis was in power with his “jealously guarded power over educational institutions,” a point made earlier in the Patterson Report as well.

McGibbon and Donald Davis argued for Toronto, stressing the importance of considering which location would make a professional arts environment more accessible to students.

It would seem obvious that such a School should be located in a centre where there is the maximum opportunity for stimulating and expanding the actual curriculum of the School. i.e. a location where the students will have the opportunity of observing as much as possible in the field of theatrical performances, music, opera, ballet, as well as the benefits of Art Galleries, Museums, Libraries, etc. As this committee has previously discussed, this would seem to narrow the choice to either Toronto or Montreal. In this connection it is felt that Toronto is most probably the more desirable location inasmuch as Montreal already enjoys a provincially and civically supported School of Drama, and also, because it is felt that the establishment of a School bi-lingual in nature for English-speaking Canada would more rapidly prove rewarding than the

establishment of a similar School in Montreal, where the bilingual aspect would be taken for granted.<sup>60</sup>

In May 1959, the Canadian Theatre Centre agreed to become more directly involved. As a result, a new Pilot Committee consisting of both English- and French-speaking members was formed. The Pilot Committee would investigate and make recommendations, and the CTC would supervise and approve those recommendations. Not surprisingly, disagreements ensued.

On May 15, the Pilot Committee met in Toronto with Saint-Denis. At that meeting, Yves Bourassa put on the record that “if the school is set up in Toronto it cannot be bilingual—certainly not for a long time.”<sup>61</sup> However, the Committee had apparently already made up its mind, at least according to Donald Davis. Davis explained that the decision to put the School in Toronto was supported for two practical reasons:

because people in Montreal, and the Canadians of French expression in general already have opportunities to study, mainly at the Conservatory of Dramatic Art of the Province of Quebec, located in Montreal, and that Canadians of English expression are in a much greater need in this respect...and because, precisely on account of the existence of the Conservatory of Dramatic Art of the Province of Quebec, as the National School will need Federal subsidies, the acceptance of such subsidies would set serious constitutional problems if the School was located in the Province of Quebec.<sup>62</sup>

Putting it directly, the argument was that Toronto was in more urgent need of a professional theatre school than Montreal, and if Toronto was chosen, it seemed more likely that financial support could be found. Yves Bourassa, working closely with Jean Pelletier, nevertheless continued to argue for Montreal. As Bourassa later said in an interview:

Jean Pelletier from Quebec City and I were probably the two... who decided that the school shouldn't be set up in Toronto because if it were set up in Toronto it would never be a bilingual school... we felt so very strongly... I remember in '59...[t]hey had come to pretty much the conclusion that the school would be set up in Toronto, and I remember the week of the [DDF] festival in Toronto, when I attended a meeting, and we were pretty well told at that time that the school would be set up with Michel Saint-Denis' help [and]... that it would be set up in Toronto... Jean and I particularly, we were the most vocal...because we felt that a school of theatre cannot live if there isn't the proper

environment...possibly the theatrical environment for English language theatre in Toronto but certainly not French.... Granted there [wasn't] much English-language theatre in Montreal but there [was] more than there [was] French-language theatre in Toronto.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, the debate here was about which location, Toronto or Montreal, had the most conducive environment for a co-lingual school. But Bourassa's contention went deeper than that, pointing to the cultural conflict in which francophones struggled to be equally represented within an organization dominated by anglophones.

In a preliminary outline for the establishment of the NTS, which summarizes recorded conversations with Saint-Denis between May 31 and June 3, the key debates surrounding location and bilingualism were clearly underscored as ongoing problems.

The whole problem of the bi-lingual aspect of the School is a thorny one, however. It is now more or less universally agreed that the location of such a School should be in Toronto, as opposed to Montreal. These two centres have, for some time past, been the prime considerations for the location of a School. This is also because it is universally felt that such a School must be located in a centre where there is the maximum theatrical activity outside the School, and also, where there is the maximum amount of extracurricular artistic stimuli- i.e. musical performances, recitals, concerts, etc., art galleries, art exhibitions, museums, libraries, etc. While it is agreed that neither of these centres is ideal, (inasmuch as English-speaking students would have little opportunity or experience of English-speaking theatre in Montreal and the French-speaking students would experience a similar deprivation in Toronto), Toronto would seem to be the logical choice....<sup>64</sup>

Surprisingly, in notes sent to Saint-Denis, it was also stated that

[t]his general conclusion was shared, not only by the English-speaking individuals involved in the preliminary discussions, but also by the representatives of French-speaking Canada, specifically Col. Yves Bourassa, Jean Pelletier and Jean-Louis Roux. It was strongly pointed out, however, by representatives from Quebec, that in their opinion there would be considerable difficulty in the original instance in attracting French-speaking students to a School established in Toronto.<sup>65</sup>

Yves Bourassa later wrote,

Jean and I never gave an approbation in such a final manner... As a matter of fact, the last decision of that meeting... was that a final decision would be withheld until such time as Jean Pelletier and I had an opportunity to talk to the

Quebec Government authorities to ascertain whether or not the assumptions about constitutional handicaps were founded or not.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, because of the School's complicated "national" mandate which required a commitment to a bi-cultural, co-lingual infrastructure, the debates were moving into much more than planning issues. A dividing line between anglophone and francophone Committee members was becoming palpable.

The arguments continued at a meeting in Stratford on July 25 with the CTC and the Pilot Committee. Out of that came a new Standing Committee consisting only of anglophones—Pauline McGibbon, Donald Davis, David Gardner, Vincent Tovell, Mavor Moore, and Michael Langham. The Standing Committee was charged specifically with establishing the School's location. However, to Langham and Gardner, the Standing Committee was "not well balanced"<sup>67</sup> since its members were only English-speaking. Davis responded that such a Committee was formed "because it is obvious that all the preliminary activities will take place in Toronto."<sup>68</sup> He added, it "will be... functional..."<sup>69</sup> To Davis, the School's bilingual mandate was understood well enough that such a Standing Committee—even with an anglophone majority—would not hinder the ethics of the decision-making process. CTC President David Ongley was not so sure.

As the Committee will have to consult...with every Canadian citizen interested in the establishment of a National Theatre School, it would not be wise to endanger, at the beginning, the good relations between the Committee and the people called in consultation...[and] in view of the future reports between the Committee and the Canada Council, it would be absolutely necessary to bring out everywhere the...bilingual nature of the school.<sup>70</sup>

Dennis Sweeting, a member of the CTC, tried to find a compromise. Sweeting believed it would be "impossible to establish a bilingual school in Toronto,"<sup>71</sup> and clearly at that point Montreal was completely ruled out as an option due to Tom Patterson's belief that the "problems that would be raised by the federal grants"<sup>72</sup> were insurmountable. Indeed, Ongley brought up Ottawa as a possible compromise location for the School. Sweeting wondered if it was necessary

for there to be a professional theatre where the School was situated. Davis' response was that having no professional theatre was only one of the reasons why Ottawa would not work. "If it is true that Ottawa is a bilingual city," Davis argued, "it is also true that not only is it short of any theatre, be it of French or English expression, but it is also lacking of any cultural activity or atmosphere."<sup>73</sup> "And everyone knows," he added, "that such an activity and such an atmosphere are an essential complement to the training received from the school."<sup>74</sup>

Director Jean Gascon—as both a working professional and a Quebecer—pointed out that it would be very difficult to attract students to the School if it were in Toronto. Davis argued that he was wrong, that French-speaking students would come from Quebec and also from many parts of Canada including the Prairies and the Maritimes. He stressed that regardless of where the School was situated, bilingualism as an ultimate goal "will take time."<sup>75</sup>

Tensions were obviously rising and time was quickly passing. At that meeting, a decision was made that the future National Theatre School of Canada would be located in Toronto unless new information could show that Montreal was viable financially. The Quebecers involved returned to Montreal knowing that clear and immediate support was needed while the anglophones turned their thoughts to issues of funding.

According to Tom Patterson, getting support from the Province of Quebec was not only hopeless, but also undesirable due to demands the Quebec government would put on the School for more Quebec students. Saint-Denis simply wanted the School to open. He wrote to Pauline McGibbon in May that he was confident in her ability to "find the money because of your knowledge of Toronto and your experience running an organization like [the] DDF for the past two years."<sup>76</sup> Saint-Denis also wrote Donald Davis that "your handling of the project is essential

and... if you can, you should not leave it before premises, the essential money and the executive staff have been assembled.”<sup>77</sup>

At that point, for a funding request to the Canada Council, the CTC wondered if it should specifically be for the English section. The Committee, however, decided against this feeling: “the Canada Council would not consider any grant if the School was not of an entirely bilingual nature.”<sup>78</sup> The Council was ultimately approached for \$20,000, including salaries for an Artistic Director, an administrator, for Saint-Denis (as consultant), teaching staff, and for travel. The Committee also began work on support from other provinces and individuals. Yet despite the new activity, the plans were all still extremely vague and at points contradictory.

According to Powys Thomas, he, McGibbon, Gardner, and Ongley met often. “[E]very two weeks.... This smells to me the healthiest progress so far.”<sup>79</sup> Thomas stated this in a letter to Saint-Denis, emphasizing that “there is every reason to be satisfied with the progress so far for the ‘school.’ The people behind it are... excellent...both in their enthusiasm and in their work. So a serious attempt is being made.”<sup>80</sup>

## **The Francophone Response**

By mid-August Yves Bourassa wrote to Ongley that he and Pelletier had been in close communication with the Provincial Secretary, Yves Prévost. “We had a marvelous session...and among other things talked about the Theatre School... All I suggest is that you don’t go too far at this stage until we have a chance to explore further about Montreal; we may be a lot closer to a solution than we think.”<sup>81</sup> “Mr. Prévost showed interest at once,” it was later recorded, “and indicated further discussions would be in order.”<sup>82</sup>

At this time, David Gardner brought up—though he was still in favour of Toronto—the possibility of locating the School jointly in Montreal for six months and in Stratford for the four summer months. Indeed, Stratford had always been an option until it was agreed, among some Committee members, that Toronto should be the permanent location.

Regardless of which city they would choose, however, there was a deep-rooted fear on both the English and French side that the potential bi-cultural experience of the students would be compromised by having the School in only one location, wherever it was. By fall 1959, Powys Thomas—by this time seen as a potential head of the School<sup>83</sup>—was asked to create a preliminary curricular blueprint for an opening in September 1960.

In September, Ongley wrote to Jean-Louis Roux asking him about Montreal, or a Montreal and Stratford combination. Yet Toronto was still first choice for most of the Committee. “As we all know,” he wrote,

the whole concept of a National School is based on the fact it must be truly bilingual. However, I think we all would agree that ‘bilingual’ is not merely teaching in two languages. Investigation has already shown that such persons can be obtained for the School if it is situated in Toronto.... An extremely important factor... if the School is to be truly bilingual, is that every possible opportunity is given to the French speaking and the English speaking student to study and develop the tradition of his mother tongue, and yet, at the same time, see good work done in the tradition of the other language. It is only in this way will the School ever develop the best in each language....theatre is one of the most potent forces we have, if properly made use of, to develop the traditions of both cultures resulting in the establishment of a unique Canadian culture in a form which could not be duplicated anywhere else in the world.<sup>84</sup>

Ongley added that while he appreciated the idea of Montreal, having a national school in Montreal would be, at the very least, “a challenging thing...to the whole of our country.... Certainly if your investigation shows it is possible, I would do everything I can in my power to forward the scheme.”<sup>85</sup>

At the same time, Thomas was writing to Saint-Denis to inform him that Jean Gascon

was vehement in his opinion that if the school was in Toronto the French side of it would die within about five years. He could not visualize at all a French school growing and thriving in Toronto, however well it started and with whatever good intentions. Gascon was extremely sincere in this....”<sup>86</sup>

Thomas noted in his letter to Saint-Denis that he could not take a specific stand on the location debate, but that if it were to be Montreal, as it was now being suggested, he would also be supportive.

I must admit that I am excited by this new proposal. The advantage to the French school being in Montreal is quite evident and the advantage of being in Stratford not only to the English School, but also to the French, is also quite evident— as the ceaseless activity here in the summer is artistically of an international standard and invaluable to a Canadian student. The school would be 5½ months in Montreal and 4 months in Stratford— and in order to keep officially the separation of the school from the Festival company in Stratford, the address of the school would be in Montreal.<sup>87</sup>

Though Thomas seemed to find positive potential in the new idea for the School location, Donald Davis remained doubtful. In a letter to Thomas on September 3 (which was also copied to Gascon and Roux), Davis acknowledged that while there was clearly progress in the planning, he continued

in a state of some concern with regard to this question of the location. I realize that you feel that this particular problem is one upon which you are not competent to express strong feelings. I am writing this in the form of a personal letter to you, however, because in the final analysis I feel that the location of the School will basically affect the kind of School it is and the way in which it is run, and that therefore it becomes a prime concern to you.<sup>88</sup>

Like Roy Stewart, Davis felt he could not fully address his concerns at Committee meetings, perhaps because he was concerned about perceived slights and perhaps because the debate had grown to such length and depth that it needed the kind of attention which it could not have been given at a meeting with the CTC.

Needless to say I am still strongly of the opinion that the School must have a permanent home and that home should be in Toronto. From the outset, I have felt that if the School is to be successful it must have a permanence of location as well as instruction and artistic direction. It must, in fact, have a distinctive



identity of its own which is unaffected by the vagaries and politics of the professional theatrical climate of the moment. I can see considerable merit in an annual 6-week junket of the students to Stratford—i.e. from July 1<sup>st</sup> to the middle or end of August, as Michael Langham suggested. I think it is a very different and dangerous matter to contemplate a School which expands [several] months of the year in Stratford and 6 months of the year in Montreal. It would seem to me obvious that no adequate permanent home can be established in both places.<sup>89</sup>

In this sense, Davis stressed that by locating the School in two distinct environments, both for months at a time, it would fail to really establish itself and would lack a stable foundation for students to learn and grow. He was also not convinced that the idea was financially feasible.

The result would be a sort of vagabond collection of instructors and students attaching themselves to the fringe of the Stratford Festival for one half of a year and to the fringe of Le Theatre de Nouveau Monde [sic], (since they are the strongest French influence at the present time), for the other 6 months. Immediately we would defeat one of the basic premises upon which these discussions were based— i.e. that the School should be completely independent in every respect from any existing theatrical or educational institution. This, however, does not preclude a happy collaboration with other institutions, but the 6 months in Montreal, 6 months in Stratford proposal would seem to me to go far beyond the realm of collaboration.<sup>90</sup>

According to Davis, Herbert Whittaker was also right in arguing for the School to be in Toronto because it was the centre of English-speaking theatre.<sup>91</sup> To Davis, this argument was irrefutable and, to his knowledge, the French-speaking theatre had not expressed any particular interest in such a school since they already had something available and relatively successful.<sup>92</sup> “The fact of the matter remains...that we are desperately needing a School to train English-speaking actors...”<sup>93</sup> Davis felt that the carpet was being pulled from under the Committee by Quebec. “This re-introduction of Montreal as a possible centre, (when in effect the decision had already been made both by the Pro-Tem Committee and by the Canadian Theatre Centre that it should be Toronto)... has political undertones which distresses me.”<sup>94</sup>

Davis also noted that there was “a considerable degree of antagonism”<sup>95</sup> within the Quebec groups, specifically between Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Gratien Gélinas over the possibility of NTS being too closely connected to the Conservatoire.

We were told last Saturday that the Province of Quebec has indicated unofficially that they welcome the expansion of the existing Conservatoire into a bi-lingual school of the Drama. This move, as we know, is much favoured by Colonel Yves Bourassa, who has Government connections, is President of the D.D.F., and a Director of Gélinas’ Theatre. This news was presented...as an indication that such a School could receive Provincial support in Quebec. In the next breath the French-Canadian representatives on the Committee indicated that they considered the present direction of the Conservatoire as unsuitable for the training of young actors, and after some discussion it was suggested that the School could still be situated in Montreal but independent of the Conservatoire—presumably the French aspect of such a School to be fostered by the Nouveau Monde interest. It would seem apparent to me that any attempt to establish a School independent of the Conservatoire would immediately eliminate the Province of Quebec, Colonel Bourassa and Dr. Gélinas. In fact, the whole Montreal situation seems impossibly complicated by internal politics.<sup>96</sup>

Davis emphatically reminded Thomas that the Artistic Director of the School had the responsibility of making sure that the question of location was handled according to what was best for the students and not what was politically right. Davis repeated those concerns to Saint-Denis on September 4, saying, “Jean Gascon and Jean-Louis Roux of Le Theatre de Nouveau Monde [sic] have once again introduced Montreal as the preferable location...[which] distressed me greatly and I intend to do everything I can to ensure its establishment in Toronto...”<sup>97</sup>

Interestingly, it was at this same time that Quebec politics suddenly changed with Quebec Premier Maurice Duplessis’ death. Duplessis was devoted to his province but not so much to its relationship with English-speaking Canada, suggesting his priority to preserve the autonomy of Canada’s French-speaking culture.<sup>98</sup> He supported Quebec artists like Gratien Gélinas, but challenged projects that sought to bring the French and English cultures together. Duplessis’ attitude, said a 1959 *Globe and Mail* article, “made co-operation between the Province and the Dominion Government difficult, at a time when such co-operation was more necessary than ever

before.”<sup>99</sup> Pauline McGibbon recognized that his death, as she delicately put it, “may change things...”<sup>100</sup>

As 1959 rolled on, the Committee was split on location with Davis and Whittaker continuing to advocate against Montreal. But a decision had to be made and quickly. Gardner finally wrote to Roux, “if there is to be reconsideration of the Pro-Tem decision, it must be done immediately.”<sup>101</sup> Roux responded to Gardner about his concerns over the whole decision-making process, noting that he was under the impression that there was a consensus in August that the Montreal-Stratford idea was the preferable decision, “so long as there was”—he quoted Gardner—“absolute freedom from political control and from any existing theatrical organization. And it must be in the Michel St. Denis concept.”<sup>102</sup> Roux said that Gardner’s recent letter

suggests that you do not think that we have the right to decide about the location of the school, considering that the Protem Committee had indicated Toronto as a possible location. Must I remind you that the Protem Committee had first declared that Montreal was the ideal location but that it was discarded on account of the constitutional and political problems that such a location would, the Committee thought, arise. As Jean Gascon and I told the meeting in Stratford... the reason mentioned would not stand a second look and on behalf of our report, we were asked, as I told you above, to continue our inquiries...I will soon fully report. But I would like to know, before going on, if we have lost our time (which is, believe me, very precious) and if we will organize future meetings absolutely for nothing...If such is the case, we will of course respect your decision but allow us to continue to think you will have a marvelous national Canadian bilingual school of dramatic art of English expression exclusively.<sup>103</sup>

Gardner in turn responded by reviewing the circumstances surrounding the whole question of location, saying that while Tom Patterson had indeed originally suggested Montreal in his Report, it seemed unlikely it would work financially. This, Gardner wrote, left Toronto as the “agreed” location by “default.”<sup>104</sup> “The decision,” Gardner stressed, “was then passed on to the C.T.C., and accepted by us, to be implemented by our first and second Pilot Committees, and the decision was further ratified at our annual meeting.”<sup>105</sup>

Gardner acknowledged that after the French side came back with a positive response from Quebec, it was realized that the reasons which had originally eliminated Montreal were not necessarily applicable anymore and that reconsideration was possible, though not guaranteed. As correspondence between Roux and Gardner suggests, there continued to be a much larger issue beyond the location debate—a lack of effective communication between Committee members, and something of a struggle for power.

I'm sorry Jean-Louis, but it was not my understanding that all the political and constitutional problems 'could not stand a second look', or in other words, do not really exist after all. For me, the question still remains unanswered, that is [would a] school in Quebec able to be completely autonomous from Provincial control, and receive federal grants? This was not made clear if it is the case, at least not made clear to me.<sup>106</sup>

Gardner added that the Montreal-Stratford idea as well was still possible.

[I]f we are to reverse the Protem decision it cannot be done casually as our meeting was conducted. The ways and means of making such a dramatic step would have to be discussed thoroughly. They were not. I quite actually feel we went too far too quickly in our loose general acceptance of the new idea, and in some sober thinking afterwards wondered whether you, and indeed all of us, fully understood that. I therefore felt it necessary to make this point to you, and now indeed feel it necessary to make the same point to all the members of the Pilot Committee. You will remember that we discussed the new idea briefly in terms of Stratford, but it was...our understanding that the only decision made was that you and Jean should investigate the possibilities formally on behalf of the Pilot Committee....<sup>107</sup>

Just as the NTS would strive to accommodate English- and French-speaking Canada, Gardner was trying to find a compromise between the planning Committee's anglophone and francophone members. He also brought up Duplessis' death and the appointment of a new Premier, Paul Sauvé. "We have no right to revoke the Protem decision," said Gardner, "or consider revoking the Protem decision, until we hear that the reasons which disallowed Montreal are indeed invalid...."<sup>108</sup> In order to calm the debate over location, Gardner insisted that no decision should be made until facts were clearer, suggesting there were other factors at play.

Location, he concluded,

is a question which cannot be answered certainly not by myself, nor by the Pilot Committee, until all the facts are in. I cannot deny that strong opinions are held, and were expressed at the recent meeting, especially some second thoughts about the idea of dividing the school between two centres, nor can I deny that there is opposition to the idea of a school in Montreal alone. However, as chairman, I feel it my duty to attempt to interpret our directive from the Protem Committee to the best of my ability. But as chairman, I am also more interested in the practical matter of founding this most necessary institution, and found in it its best interests. In reopening the whole question of location we reopen a hornet's nest. Some feel the question should not have been reopened. I do not share this feeling. If there is the other location, I think it must be investigated fully, and the facts clearly understood, perhaps for the first time....[But] personally I cannot agree... that a Canadian and national and bilingual theatre school set up in English-speaking Canada would be of English expression exclusively. You must have more faith in our determined aim to set up a school that will teach its students in both the French and English traditions, and teach them...in equal manner. The school will never function unless this belief is held deeply by all of us.<sup>109</sup>

Clearly, Gardner was trying to mediate the conflict between the anglophone and francophone planners, reminding both sides that their priority was practicality and not politics.

Indeed, further government meetings did take place on the French side, encouraging the idea of an independent bilingual school to avoid the possible political implications that came with Quebec government support. Quebec, in the person of Prévost, was concerned over how the Canadian School would distinguish itself from the already established Conservatoire d'art dramatique, which he himself supported, and whether such a school's existence in Montreal would threaten the reputation of the Conservatoire. The bilingual, or national, aspect was certainly acknowledged as one distinguishing factor, but how would the future NTS differ in its curriculum and approach? Indeed, Prévost indicated that he would be putting himself in a precarious position by encouraging a second professional theatre school which would be, in a sense, a competitor of the Conservatoire. "Give us more and better than the Conservatory and you can be assured of [my]... support,"<sup>110</sup> said Prévost, who also noted that

it is quite possible that within a few months, the Provincial Secretariat would acquire the entire building where the premises of the Provincial Conservatory are now located. If such is the case, it is practically sure henceforth that the Canadian School of Dramatic Art would find herein the required premises...<sup>111</sup>

As for Saint-Denis, he continued to be publicly neutral saying only that he found the Montreal-Stratford idea attractive, but that he did not have any preferences. "I am like you," Saint-Denis wrote to Powys Thomas, "for other reasons: I do not want to take side in this debate or dispute, where, I believe many different sorts of feelings are entangled."<sup>112</sup> He later wrote to McGibbon that he did not want to give the French-Canadians any feeling that the School would not be bilingual. "[I]t is entirely for you [the Committees] to decide."<sup>113</sup> But Saint-Denis did have questions regarding the practicality of the dual-centre idea, stressing that such a decision would make it difficult to decide on whether or not the School should be residential since students would have to "re-house themselves every time the school moved."<sup>114</sup> "Is it easy to find 'digs' at the right price?"<sup>115</sup> he asked. Saint-Denis felt that the idea of making the School "residential" was important financially, that having a residential school with a cafeteria along with a reasonable number of scholarships was "much easier to establish."<sup>116</sup>

Indeed, the Conservatoire was being seen at this point as the French section of the new School, an approach with which Gascon himself did not agree. Indeed, he would not agree unless the Conservatoire adhered to the overall vision of the national School.<sup>117</sup> What became increasingly clear was that Patterson's ideas about a lack of Quebec support were simply assumptions on his part and not, in fact, the reality. Prévost had stated directly to Bourassa and Pelletier that there was a good chance that Quebec would provide significant financial backing and possibly a building. Indeed, the sum of \$50,000 was mentioned (and ultimately given). As Bourassa later put it, he and Pelletier

went after the Quebec government and... succeeded in getting a grant... There was no ministry of cultural affairs then, [Yves Prévost] was the man responsible

for matters of cultural affairs, and we convinced him that he [should] give us a grant to allow us to set up the school.... Prevost gave us \$50,000 to set up the school.... [It was] people like Jean Pelletier and I who were completely uninhibited and didn't know enough not to go after the government... and this is how it started in Montreal..... Pelletier and myself... were fools enough to go after the government...asking for \$50,000 when grants of that type were unheard of.<sup>118</sup>

Prévost advised Bourassa and Pelletier to set up a meeting with the Director of the Conservatoire, Jean Valcourt, “in order to lay our plan before him and to give the exact information about the curriculum of the proposed school as well as about the standard of learning.”<sup>119</sup> The meeting with Valcourt took place on September 24, 1959 and included Bourassa, Gascon, Pelletier, Roux, and Marcel Riché. A second meeting took place on September 28, this one with the Pilot Committee. The Committee wanted a financial commitment. Prévost declared that support would be given even if Quebec “were the only Province to co-operate.”<sup>120</sup> Prévost added that, of course, “the Province of Quebec would be more generous if its gesture [of support] was imitated”<sup>121</sup> by Ontario and the Canada Council. Indeed, though Bourassa knew that the project was at risk of creating problems for the Conservatoire, he was “perfectly convinced that such a solution can easily be reached.”<sup>122</sup> Quebec was in. Montreal would be the location.

In a letter to Tom Patterson, on October 9, 1959, Gardner acknowledged that huge strides were being made with regard to all of these issues and that it seemed they would get the support of the Quebec government. Indeed, “the Provincial government and the Montreal Arts Council have tentatively expressed both support and financial assistance, with no strings attached.”<sup>123</sup> It was also agreed that the new School would not be affiliated with the Conservatoire. “From the Quebec government’s point of view,” Gardner wrote, they seem willing to “support two schools in Montreal.”<sup>124</sup> At this point, Gardner seemed totally confident in the Montreal-Stratford link.

He even asked Patterson to meet with Michael Langham to discuss how the School could work in Stratford and suggested that it was time to approach the Ontario government for financial support.

## **Next Steps**

On October 26, a report summarizing all the meetings that year was presented to the planning group. Attending were Gardner (Chairman), Vincent Tovell (acting Secretary), Ongley, McGibbon, Stewart, Powys Thomas, Mavor Moore, and Yves Bourassa. Bourassa, speaking for the francophone members who were not there, reaffirmed the positive feedback and support from Quebec authorities including the President of the Montreal Arts Council, Leon Lortie, who also promised support. Overall, Bourassa noted that the attitude in Montreal was, in fact, positive across the Board—“on the part of provincial, municipal and university circles...”<sup>125</sup> Tom Patterson’s initial concerns had been proven wrong.

Bourassa also believed it was likely they could get 25 percent of the needed funding from Quebec and another 20 percent from the Montreal Arts Council along with a possible building for the School.<sup>126</sup> Ongley suggested that if those amounts proved viable, the Canada Council would probably contribute 25 percent as well. This would leave 30 percent or so of the budget to be raised through scholarships or grants from other provincial governments, industry and/or private donations. He felt this was viable. The Committee agreed and a preliminary first year budget was set at \$100,000 including student scholarships<sup>127</sup> of approximately \$2,000 each.<sup>128</sup>

Bourassa said that even with 40 or 45 percent financial support from Quebec there were no expectations for more than a few Quebec students to go to the new School, and that those who were French-speaking might actually be from other Canadian provinces, such as New Brunswick



and Manitoba. Consequently, “a national school would be...no rival to the Conservatoire which is mainly an acting school for students in the Province of Quebec.”<sup>129</sup>

Moore reminded the Committee that Montreal had been, in fact, the favoured location, and that

there had never at any time been a question of intercity rivalry when the possibility of locating the school in Toronto had come up. Doubts about the difficulties of locating it in Montreal—about establishing it independently of government or institutional controls and obligations—had been raised initially by some of the Montreal Committee members themselves.<sup>130</sup>

Bourassa agreed that it was not any anti-Montreal feeling which sparked the location controversy, but rather concerns about Quebec funding, the existence of the already established Conservatoire in Montreal, and the risk of compromising the bilingual aspects of the School if it were established in unilingual Toronto.

As for the proposed Stratford tie-in, it was reported that the Board of Governors of the Festival, along with the Stratford Chamber of Commerce, were both open to the idea of having a national theatre school there. It was agreed that the School must be officially independent of the Festival, though students would be welcome to participate in aspects of the Festival to gain practical experience outside of classes.<sup>131</sup> The facilities of the nearby Stratford Collegiate there would be made available at a nominal rent for an auditorium, two gymnasias, a cafeteria, and classrooms.<sup>132</sup>

At this point, the real question turned to how much the Province of Ontario would contribute. Ongley and Gardner were asked to explore this issue along with obtaining support from the Canada Council. In the end, they would—along with Vincent Tovell—also approach former Governor-General Vincent Massey, whom they hoped would be interested in financing and supporting the School, and in being on its Board of Governors.

Though many details remained hazy, approval for the National Theatre School vision was ready to approach reality. An opening date was set for September 1960, less than twelve months away. In the next chapter the Committee's final recommendations for the School building will be identified, along with some study of the NTS' initial funding, curriculum, faculty, and its official name will be explored.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Saint-Denis, letter to Pauline McGibbon, October 6, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> The Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier was the theatre company of Jacques Copeau, which he founded in Paris in 1913, and at which Saint-Denis trained and worked until 1929. At the Vieux-Colombier, Saint-Denis witnessed and participated in what was essentially a movement against naturalism at the time. The work done at the Vieux-Colombier emphasized the technical training of the actor's 'instrument'— voice, speech, and body— through improvisation, as well as the development of an ensemble, training within what Copeau emphasized was the architecture of a conducive environment (Railsback, "Michel Saint-Denis and the Organic Theatre", 47).

<sup>3</sup> "Bilingualism," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, last modified February 24, 2015, accessed June 21, 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/bilingualism/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Bilingualism and Biculturalism," Brief submitted to Royal Commission, n.d., 7-9, F0453, Herbert Whittaker Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Schwartzel, email message to author with television clip of CBC Speech by Michel Saint-Denis, "Michel Saint-Denis On Theatre," *Tabloid*, May 5, 1958, CBC Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Saint-Denis' generalizations of how the Committee should proceed with the planning of the School could suggest that he had doubts about the School and whether or not it could succeed in opening as a professional training institution, particularly considering that the Canadian theatre was still predominantly amateur and that very little was known at that point about who would support the School project.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Whittaker, "Show Business: It's Time to Start Our National Theatre School," *Globe and Mail*, May 24, 1958, 15, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1313924035/261E05CB98AB479BPQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>12</sup> There were no documents in the archives to prove if this was indeed Saint-Denis' sentiment towards the Canadian theatre.

<sup>13</sup> L.D. Court, "Theatre before Theatre School," *Globe and Mail*, May 30, 1958, 6, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1288564364/261E05CB98AB479BPQ/6?accountid=15182>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Yves Bourassa, [Sound Recording], n.d., R5415-0-1-E, Theatre Canada Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>16</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 25, 1959, 8, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada

<sup>17</sup> "History," *Conservatoire de musique et d'art dramatique*, accessed August 2, 2015, <http://www.conservatoire.gouv.qc.ca/english/article/history>.

<sup>18</sup> Robin Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, April 24, 1958, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>20</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Patterson, May 7, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>21</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Jean Pelletier, May 30, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>22</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Roy Stewart, August 6, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>23</sup> Patterson, letter to Saint-Denis, June 25, 1958, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>24</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Stewart, August 6, 1958.
- <sup>25</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Pelletier, May 30, 1958.
- <sup>26</sup> Pelletier, letter to Saint-Denis, July 11, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>27</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, February 25, 1959, 4-5, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>28</sup> “Historical Development of the Canadian School of Dramatic Art,” *A Plan for the Establishment of the National Theatre School of Canada*, February 8, 1960, 68, R4750-0-5-E, David Gardner Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.
- <sup>29</sup> Roy Stewart, letter to Mavor Moore, September 24, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>30</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to McGibbon, August 5, 1958, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>31</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Pelletier, August 6, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>32</sup> “Report by Tom Patterson on a Canadian Drama School”, n.d., 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>44</sup> Pelletier, letter to Saint-Denis, November 4, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>45</sup> Stewart, letter to Eva Langbord, December 11, 1958, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>46</sup> Stewart, letter to members of Pro-Tem Committee, November 4, 1958, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>49</sup> McGibbon and David Gardner, "A Step By Step History Of The Founding Of A Canadian School Of Dramatic Art," n.d., 3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>50</sup> Meeting Minutes, March 2 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>51</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, February 25, 1959, 2-5, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>52</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Stewart, March 3, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>53</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, February 25, 1959.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Pauline McGibbon, Donald Davis, and Powys Thomas, "Report to the Pro-Tem Committee for the Establishment of a School of the Theatrical Arts in Canada," April 20, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Stewart, letter to Saint-Denis, April 26, 1959, 1-3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>58</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Stewart, March 3, 1959.
- <sup>59</sup> Powys Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, April 30, 1959, 1-3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>60</sup> McGibbon, Davis, and Thomas, "Report to the Pro-Tem Committee for the Establishment of a School of the Theatrical Arts in Canada," 3.
- <sup>61</sup> Meeting Minutes, May 15, 1959, David Gardner Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.
- <sup>62</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 25, 1959, 9, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>63</sup> Interview with Yves Bourassa, [Sound Recording].
- <sup>64</sup> "A Preliminary Outline for the establishment of a National Bi-lingual School for the Theatrical Arts," 13 June, 1959, 7-8, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, British Library.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Yves Bourassa, letter to David Ongley, October 19, 1959, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>67</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 25, 1959, 9.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>76</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to McGibbon, June 3, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>77</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Donald Davis, June 4, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>78</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 25, 1959, 10.

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, August 15, 1959, 2-3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Bourassa, letter to Ongley, August 25, 1959, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>82</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>83</sup> Though no particular reasons for why Powys Thomas was suggested as the head of the School were found in the archives, nor were there any indications of when exactly his name came up for the position and by whom, it is possible that Saint-Denis suggested him to the Pilot Committee once Thomas came on board to help with the School project, after his work with Antony Ferry fell through. Thomas was a former pupil of Saint-Denis' at the Old Vic and he knew very well his theatre and actor training principles.

<sup>84</sup> Ongley, letter to Jean-Louis Roux, September 1, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, September 1, 1959, 3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Davis, letter to Thomas, September 3, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that within the discussion surrounding the location of the NTS, the only building suggested and considered in Toronto, according to Herbert Whittaker, was Glendon College (today part of York University campus) ("A Dream Fulfilled, or Almost," *l'École/The School* 53). No other mention of a specific building or street in Toronto being considered for the School happened. On the one hand, at this time, Toronto lacked available buildings suitable for performance spaces, so perhaps no suggestions for a Toronto space were given as a result. On the other hand, various kinds of buildings in Montreal were being considered including an old monastery, which would have been renovated if needed be. Was anyone on the planning Committee actually investigating any other buildings in Toronto for the School? Or was the decision, by this point, already made for the School to be located in Montreal? Though no specific answer to these questions were found in any documents, one might argue that Montreal was decided on because Bourassa, Pelletier, and the other francophone planning members were deeper into their investigation for the School, and with time running out, the planners needed to find the School a home, if even a temporary one.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>97</sup> Davis, letter to Saint-Denis, September 4, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

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- <sup>98</sup> “Maurice Le Noblet Duplessis,” *Globe and Mail*, September 8, 1959, 6, accessed September 5, 2015,  
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1288713643/3187208DA35E4B28PQ/1?accountid=15182>.
- <sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>100</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, September 13, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>101</sup> Gardner, letter to Roux, September 17, 1959, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>102</sup> Roux, letter to Gardner, September 18, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- <sup>104</sup> Gardner, letter to Roux, September 20, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>110</sup> Report of a meeting between Yves Bourassa, Jean Gascon, Jean Pelletier, and Jean-Louis Roux, September 17, 1959, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>112</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Thomas, October 6, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>113</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to McGibbon, October 6, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>114</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Thomas, October 6, 1959.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>117</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, September 1, 1959, 2.
- <sup>118</sup> Interview with Yves Bourassa, [Sound Recording].
- <sup>119</sup> Report of a meeting between Bourassa, Gascon, Pelletier, and Roux, September 17, 1959, 2.
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>123</sup> Gardner, letter to Patterson, October 9, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>125</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>127</sup> Ongley, letter to Saint-Denis, October 30, 1959, 3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>128</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 5.
- <sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.



# Chapter Four

## Toward a Final Blueprint (1959-1960)

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### A Brief Chronology

#### 1959

- Summer. The Pilot Committee says that students attending the new School will be between 18 and 25 years of age, that they will be accepted based only on talent, and that they will be supported through scholarships.
- Fall. A decision is formally made to situate the School in Montreal for the fall and winter terms and at Stratford for the summer term.
- The Committee confirms Powys Thomas as Artistic Director of the English section. Saint-Denis agrees only to be “Artistic Advisor” to the Board of Governors.
- November. The School project receives a preliminary \$2000 grant from the Canada Council.
- November 26 to 28. Saint-Denis agrees to details of the Powys Thomas Blueprint.
- December. The search for an Artistic Director for the French section begins.

#### 1960

- January. Vincent Tovell and David Gardner present the preliminary Blueprint to the Canadian Theatre Centre for approval. There is much debate.
  - February 8. The Blueprint is approved. The School will open in November 1960.
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This chapter looks closely at the development of a bi-cultural NTS curriculum and the formation of a co-lingual faculty, particularly within the continuing discussions surrounding bilingualism, location, and funding. More specifically, a complete outline or “blueprint” of the School’s infrastructure will be examined through the lens of the organizers and their concerns, and will suggest the extent to which the financial realities and cultural politics of the time influenced and underlined the final recommendations and decisions behind the NTS.

After months of debating the location and financial aspects of the new School, and with Saint-Denis due to return to Canada in the fall of 1959, more detailed discussions and recommendations regarding curriculum, faculty, and even the School name needed to happen. In response, a blueprint was prepared, which included: “the location of the School...educated guesses with regard to costs, our suggestions as to structure and curriculum, and the information we have about possible sources of revenue for the School.”<sup>1</sup> This was to be the School’s skeleton, an outline not only of how the School should be established, but how it should be operated. There were a myriad of considerations in its construction. What courses should be offered? How should they be taught—which techniques and theatrical traditions? Who should teach them? How would those courses cater to and enrich both English and French traditions and cultures? When would the English and French sections meet? Should they meet? How should the faculty be selected? How should applicants be selected? Should the School offer a degree or a diploma? What needed to be implemented in order to achieve the Committee’s vision of creating a truly national theatre school in Canada?

There were many variables to consider in answering these questions. Would they be able to find an equal number of anglophone and francophone students of talent at the auditions to represent a “national” student body? Would they be able to find a co-lingual faculty of professionals to represent both language groups of the School equally? Would the Committee be able to afford a staff of anglophone, francophone, and bilingual instructors who could also teach within Saint-Denis’ concept of theatre training? If the Committee was financially limited, how would they prioritize which classes to offer? What would be the deciding factor in selecting faculty and students, and in creating the curriculum: ensuring the English and French cultures were equally represented, financial feasibility, or attainment of quality and high standards? Was

it possible for the planning Committee to achieve all these elements? Indeed, these questions suggest not only how precarious every decision was for the planners and for the NTS, but they also demonstrate the complicated nature of—as Postlewait argues—the NTS as a product of its cultural, financial, and socio-political circumstances.

At one meeting devoted heavily to a philosophy for the NTS, Saint-Denis, Powys Thomas, Pauline McGibbon, Vincent Tovell, and Donald Davis asked what makes a good actor and what kind of training and environment would help develop one for the professional theatre in Canada. Saint-Denis argued that the actor had to be trained in (among other things) dance, mime, and acrobatics. He believed that the actor who acquired a wide-ranging body of knowledge—including theatre history—was a versatile actor, one who could also become a director.<sup>2</sup>

He must be trained to improvise, which means to create, to invent, not to invent his text but to invent his action.... Now, there is a cultural background also by which I mean the poetry and the good prose of your own language and the history of drama, the history of customs and arts of each period, not at all from the scholarly point of view...a rough history of the stage...the knowledge and the discussion of the great novels of the world, the novels that can be good for an actor, like Dickens, Balzac... Apart from that, there is about one year which [should be] devoted mainly to improvisation at the same time as practice of text, the voice and the body...[He must begin] to discover what it is to act as opposed to reciting, or reading... on the technical side, the voice from the first day together with the body, and by this I don't mean only diction, I mean the real training of the breathing system so as to produce the voice and place it somewhere.<sup>3</sup>

For Saint-Denis, creating a curriculum for actor training was an ongoing process, especially complicated for a bi-cultural school. The NTS curriculum, he advised, should be rooted in improvisation so to train the student toward a certain level of creativity. His suggestion of the classic works of writers such as Dickens and Balzac clearly frames the kind of improvisation he was implying—that which would develop through the literary and the poetic, a curriculum rooted in classical traditions of thought and style.<sup>4</sup> Saint-Denis explained that it held in technical

courses: “[W]e had in Strasbourg technical courses... for a year...organized around the study of... styles.”<sup>5</sup>

Davis asked Saint-Denis if he felt they were also to be responsible for providing training in radio, film, and broadcasting. Saint-Denis said that radio—that is, training the voice for that medium—was not an issue but that television and film were.<sup>6</sup> He also asked Saint-Denis about how many students he believed should be trained at the School, to which Saint-Denis responded up to 30. Saint-Denis added that this number was based on financing more than anything else. Pauline McGibbon said she thought 30 were too many to place in the existing theatre community. Saint-Denis also insisted on a three-year program with an additional year attached to a working theatre company.

Saint-Denis also stressed that his time observing U.S. universities showed him how compromised the quality of students and staff were in such settings. “They don’t give them a professional training. In America, it’s an amateur training, especially in acting. A school like Yale is extremely bad in acting, it has no value at all. Yale is good in a technical sense. Now all the others are the same.”<sup>7</sup> Saint-Denis understood that some sort of certificate marking the completion of a school program was necessary so he was not completely against giving students some kind of paper to signify that training. However, he was hesitant to put too much emphasis on any type of official certification since it would likely end up becoming the goal, as opposed to the training itself. “I think people who put money into it, whether the provincial government, civic, Canada Council, or whatever, would expect some kind of evidence... that they can defend their...subsidies. [But]...we’ve no procedure to go on.”<sup>8</sup>

Between May 31 and June 3, 1959, almost all the issues were addressed in detail. At that point, the planners agreed that students would be accepted in acting, directing, and production and only based on talent.

[T]he economic facts of life, as far as Canada is concerned, are that the major employer of acting and directing talent is, at the moment, and will continue to be for some time, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, that is, radio and television. Having acknowledged this fact, it was the consensus that this School must nevertheless be concerned with the training of actors (and directors...) for the Theatre. It would be foolish to attempt to establish a complete technical school. At the end of the suggested training period, however, it would seem eminently desirable, if the economics of the School will allow it, to provide a specialized course in film and television technique. (Training for the radio—i.e. the use of the voice alone, the technical use of the microphone, presents no problem. This would be touched on throughout the basic training period).<sup>9</sup>

Another continuing argument had to do with the new School's relation to existing university programs in drama. Saint-Denis felt strongly that students who had already graduated from a university would not only be too old for the new School, but also "already too inflexible."<sup>10</sup>

In July, the CTC met with the Pilot Committees again in Stratford to concretize the recommendations. Among them: students admitted would be between 18 and 25 years of age, acceptance would be based on talent, and finances would be addressed through scholarships.<sup>11</sup> Academic degrees would not be required for applicants. The Committees also agreed that there would be—in addition to the practical work—lectures pertaining to various theatrical periods.<sup>12</sup> Thomas urged several times that the training be "lively" and "not a dry nor academic one."<sup>13</sup> The goal was clear: to put students in contact with professional theatre people in the training.<sup>14</sup> Davis said that he hoped that later in its development the School would also include writers and directors, "not only for the professional but also for the amateur field."<sup>15</sup>

At a meeting of the Pilot Committee on August 5, Powys Thomas was formally named the School's Artistic Director. Also established that summer of 1959 was the position of Fund-Raising Chairman. This person was to be "a distinguished businessman, and/or leader in the Arts,"<sup>16</sup> who would work on both the "Preliminary Financing (expenses necessary to the establishment of the School) [and] the actual Fund-Raising for the School (building rental or purchase; staff salaries and administrative costs; student scholarships)."<sup>17</sup>

On August 14, David Gardner wrote to Gascon and Roux asking them to analyze the existing curriculum of the Conservatoire d'art dramatique as a possible model. "There are probably other schools which you know about in Quebec that we are not aware of, and any and all information about them would be invaluable in our attempts to create a practical and valuable bilingual programme for the School."<sup>18</sup> Gardner also asked them if they had any recommendations for actual teaching staff that Powys and the Pilot Committee could consider.<sup>19</sup> Also requested were Gascon and Roux's thoughts on a possible relationship with the Conservatoire. "This of course," Gardner noted,

would be your own personal opinions, and not at this time, any overture to, or expression of opinion from, the Conservatoire itself. This is very important. I am just thinking in terms of liaisons as they have been suggested for instance, with the University of Toronto (attending some lectures for example), Stratford (students making properties might work there during the pre-season period), Royal Conservatory of Music (students might take some singing classes etc.).<sup>20</sup>

In a letter to Saint-Denis on August 15, Pauline McGibbon asked him to choose a title to officially connect him with the new School. "We do want you associated with the school," she wrote, "and hope you will agree to let us have your advice and use your name."<sup>21</sup> The Pilot Committee was planning to ask Saint-Denis if he would accept the title of "Consulting Director," which David Gardner called "an honorary but active association with the school."<sup>22</sup> She also asked,

As the Old Vic School no longer exists, could you give us a breakdown on its finances—where did the revenue come from and in what proportion were they expended i.e. rent, salaries, etc. I think Powys was writing Pierre [Lefèvre] about Strasbourg. Can we get any information—financial, curriculum—from Juilliard? If so, from whom? Any help you can give us in this regard will be greatly appreciated.<sup>23</sup>

On August 22, Saint-Denis responded, agreeing to look for documents from the Old Vic, Strasbourg, and Juilliard, but also reminding her that the planning Committee should not be focusing too much on studying other schools, especially since their vision of a national theatre school required a different approach with its bilingual mandate. He again mentioned the issues of degrees, noting that this would negate the ultimate purpose of the School as a unique professional theatre training institution.

The important thing is not to let the planning start in the wrong way. From my previous work in London... [and] Strasbourg and from the careful study of the [A]merican scene, I have definite ideas about the main dangers; one must not try to do too much. The question of granting 'Degrees' is connected with the system of 'Credits' and with... 'Academic Courses'; all sides of the training must be integrated as 'Dramatic Training', even those matters which are more on the academic side by essence. The main purpose is not and, in my view must not be to train teachers of Drama... on the University model but professional actors, directors, designers, technicians for all branches of the theatre. So, the two main divisions are: an acting course which is essential and purely technical courses which, after a year may, for gifted people, develop into an advanced direction or design course. Naturally, in all this I do not want to be too dogmatic: there are certainly Canadian problems, like the problem of languages, with which, in spite of my conversations with Donald Davis and others, I am not familiar. Those problems should be raised by the Committee, examined by Powys and, if necessary, discussed with me when I come....<sup>24</sup>

“You know that I am glad to give advice,” he added, “if it is wanted.”<sup>25</sup> In this sense, Saint-Denis was suggesting that the Canadian planners learn from the U.S.’ “University model,” warning them that the NTS should not use the same model of training or else the plan to develop the Canadian theatre toward higher levels might not happen.

David Gardner also wrote to director Malcolm Black, then in New York and working with the Stratford (Connecticut) Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy, requesting any

information detailing the establishment and operations of that institution. He asked for “all written material... your annual calendar or prospectus, and any other matters that you might think useful to us in the preparation of a blueprint for our own school.”<sup>26</sup> More specifically, Gardner requested information on any financial arrangements, scholarships, credits, building requirements, administrative set-up, a list of subjects taught and staff requirements, number of students, length of terms, and the professional relationships.<sup>27</sup> “Your information and opinions,” Gardner wrote, “will be of inestimable value to us in these formative stages.”<sup>28</sup>

More and more, the planners were convinced that a summer term in Stratford might be a great advantage to the students. Powys Thomas wrote to Saint-Denis on August 29,

It was agreed that the school should move to Stratford for the summer term to coincide with the period of activity here...[and] it was conceded in principle by Mr. [Michael] Langham that apprentices, technical [and] acting to the rough number of seven, could be accepted for paid work at the theatre in the summer of their second year. They could return fully to the school for their third year. In my view this is a healthy step breaking the danger of the ivory castle at the end of a two year point in their training when they should be strong enough to take it; also allowing them opportunity in lieu of money (for their maintenance during the year) in the healthy, professional [and] creative atmosphere of the theatre.<sup>29</sup>

Thomas also went on to suggest ultimately adding “a two year course for both designers [and] directors.”<sup>30</sup>

The first would be very general for both—certainly taking in a lot of the acting course (e.g. improvisation, with [and] without masks invaluable). Specialization, then, would not take place till the second year....The equivalent of the Old Vic Advanced School worries me, as I am not qualified to give it. It needs an outside [and] experienced authority to come in occasionally. I think this is possible.”<sup>31</sup>

Saint-Denis agreed that the School should not just train actors but designers and directors as well, yet he also noted that a fuller discussion surrounding technical courses was needed to ensure that they would be practicable. As he put it,

it is as important not to try to do too much with the un-gifted and un-cultured students in direction or design as it is to develop the good people to a superior level



and, for that you need three to four years, during which the best can become assistants in the school or with a company.<sup>32</sup>

## **Preliminary Blueprint**

By that fall, the Preliminary Blueprint was calling the future NTS “The Canadian School of Dramatic Art – l’Ecole Canadienne d’art dramatique.”<sup>33</sup> Its projected opening date was to be September 1960. Its official purpose would be “to promote the study of the dramatic arts in general in the highest possible standard, for the professional theatre.”<sup>34</sup> Key aspects of the School’s purpose reflected clearly Saint-Denis’ interests:

an imaginative approach to the art of the theatre based on the richness of and scope of the classics, but not hide-bound by any traditionalism. For instance, for the actor, training of the imagination, voice and body, for a complete approach to the theatre, encompassing all the elements of the actor’s art, mime, acrobatics, singing, dancing, and improvisation; and leading towards a search for vital and contemporary experiment. This general approach would naturally be applied to all branches of the theatre, directing, designing, etc.<sup>35</sup>

The second focused on things Canadian such as being national and bilingual.

The school will...[fulfill] a national need and [receive] national support. All things considered, preference will be given to students ordinarily resident, or intending residence, in Canada. But application from students will be considered from anywhere in the world. There shall be no academic qualifications necessary, only a practical and working knowledge of either the French or English languages. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to provide basic training in either French or English for students not speaking either language. This training must be obtained elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

The import of the language aspect was clear.

The school...[would take] advantage of a unique Canadian opportunity to house under one roof both the French and English language theatrical traditions, in the hope that they will enrich each other by mutual contact and understanding over a period of years. There will be one course [section] for French speaking students and one for English speaking. Each language group will be trained in its own tradition but be encouraged to learn the other language, and if possible, there should be at least one session a week devoted to acting in the other’s language. Whenever possible, such as in technical aspects of courses, for example,

movement, physical improvisations, fencing, acrobatics, dancing, the two courses [sections] will be combined.<sup>37</sup>

Agreed as well was that the School would be “co-educational” and would not provide residences, as “a residential school could too easily create an attitude of ingrown sterility and too easily become removed from society at large.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, students needed to maintain their relationships with communities outside of the School. The training curriculum for actors and directors was proposed to take three years, for designers two years,<sup>39</sup> and each year would be broken into three terms—fall, winter, and summer. Running separately from the School’s main training was to be a six-week to two-month summer course open to the public.<sup>40</sup> The summer course—clearly a DDF demand since it meant opening its doors to the amateur theatre community—would accept approximately 50 paying students of any age fluent in French or English chosen from a written application about their theatre background and an interview. The course would offer classes based on the School’s core curriculum.

It was stressed that the fundamental attitude of full-time students should be to become “an artist of quality in the professional theatre”<sup>41</sup> and that the School would try to place graduates with companies or help find them work in the field, whether the theatre, television, radio or film, though this was not guaranteed and would not be solely the School’s responsibility.<sup>42</sup>

A probationary period of one term was proposed during which students could be asked to leave. Acting students specifically would generally not be allowed to work outside of the School program without permission. Students would be encouraged to work in any field, however, only during their two-month vacation period. This would hopefully allow them to save enough money for personal needs. Though non-Canadian students would be considered, Canadian applicants, or applicants with Canadian residence, would be given priority. Like any other applicants,

however, “students from other countries will be accepted on the basis of talent,” only if space is available and if they are fluent in either French or English.<sup>43</sup>

The idea of creating a School-connected company composed of the best graduating students, as Saint-Denis had done in England and in France, was also noted in these preliminary documents. The idea was to set up a “studio” theatre at the end of the second or third year made up of students and graduates of the School. The goal would be

- To do this with the addition of other professional performers not trained in the school.
- To farm out the finishing students to other existing companies for a year of professional theatre work divorced from any student-teacher relationship, and then after the year call them back into a school company.
- To form alliances with two already existing companies, companies young in spirit, one in French and one in English, whose ranks would be fed from the school... Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde or [Stratford’s] Canadian Players.<sup>44</sup>

The selection procedure for entering actors would involve a written application, an interview, and only then an audition. Auditions would take place across the country—Vancouver, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. At least one bilingual person would be involved, in most cases the School’s two Artistic Directors. As the Blueprint noted, “[t]alent alone shall be the basis for accepting a student, that is, no talented student will be refused for any lack of finances.”<sup>45</sup> Saint-Denis insisted that students must “not [be]... young and inexperienced... nor be old...set and inflexible in...mental attitudes to life and to the type of training provided.”<sup>46</sup>

The final number of students to be accepted for the first year was set at 20 with a graduation expected of 15. “The object of the school,” it was written, “will always be to create quality rather than quantity.”<sup>47</sup> It was noted that a portion of the students’ fees should be paid by the students themselves, “for complete subsidization removes a valuable stimulus of working towards a goal.”<sup>48</sup> For prospective design and directing students, there would be no age

restrictions. Also offered scholarships, design students would be selected through an application, interview, and an evaluation of drawings or designs. Four to six design students were to be accepted annually into a two-year program.

Directing students would go through a similar interview process, but would also need to provide a directorial concept of a play or scene, on both a practical and theoretical level, particularly with regard to sets, characterization, style of production, and practical blocking. Five to ten students would be accepted annually as directors into what was seen at that point as a three-year program.

The curriculum for both actors and directors would include three years of voice and diction training, improvisation with and without masks, text work, lectures and discussions on the history of drama and literature from both a Canadian and an international context. Students would also have the opportunity to train in aspects of film, television, and radio. Both language groups would train together in classes such as movement (including mime), dance, acrobatics, eurythmics, period styles, and fencing.<sup>49</sup> Directing students would take on practical work starting in the second year.

The Design courses would consist of elements of the acting courses and lectures and discussions surrounding theatre history. There would be practical classes in design, set construction, costumes, property making, as well as a class studying stage and production management and lighting. Design students too would be trained in aspects of film and television.

Although a Playwriting course was also considered, no formal classes in that area were envisioned early on and “young writers will be encouraged to attend classes and observe the work of the School. If a theatre company is formed out of the school...[,]writers must be attached

to it. There would be no fees charged, the attendance of writers being... voluntary and personal...”<sup>50</sup>

## **The Blueprint Grows**

With Saint-Denis’ next visit that fall, actions were moving forward on many fronts. Mavor Moore pushed hard to scout potential faculty as soon as possible<sup>51</sup> while Ongley and Gardner focused on having a stellar Board. Several sought to involve Vincent Massey. In a letter to Massey on November 5, David Ongley wrote,

knowing your great interest in, and love of, theatre, and its growth and development in Canada, we would appreciate very much indeed if we might have your aid and encouragement. Our ‘blueprint’ has reached the point where it would be of inestimable value to us if we could spend a short period of time with you to go over some of the salient points.<sup>52</sup>

Massey wrote back to Ongley that while he was supportive of the establishment of the new School, he was too busy to provide any “active” efforts.<sup>53</sup> However, he agreed to meet with Board people prior to Saint-Denis’ visit.

At about the same time, Ongley received a letter from Canada Council head Peter Dwyer, approving a small preliminary grant and saying,

[t]he officers of the Council have very much appreciated the information which has been given them of your progress to date and hope that you will continue to keep us advised informally of your progress towards the formation of a national school.<sup>54</sup>

Saint-Denis arrived in Toronto on November 26 and met first with Powys Thomas. On November 28 he traveled to Montreal and met with most of the others on the Pilot Committee.

The November 28 meeting was held at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Montreal with Gardner, McGibbon, Moore, Ongley, Tom Patterson, Roux, Tovell, Bourassa, and Gélinas attending. On Saint-Denis’ mind at that time was the long-term goal of establishing the company in the final

year. He wanted to be sure that the School's company not compete with any already existing professional groups. He also wanted its repertory to consist of plays that professional companies would not normally do, and urged that graduates of the School be under no pressure to join the NTS company.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, he made clear that though professional and offering professional opportunities, this graduation group was essentially an extension of the School.

Pauline McGibbon felt there was also a need to connect the School with the DDF. Not everyone took to the idea, however. Ongley—a former President of the DDF—expressed concern even over the summer course because it could potentially compromise or “deprive the school of its standard of professional identity.”<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, the DDF's own financial situation<sup>57</sup> eventually forced it to pull out of the NTS planning altogether. Over the next year, McGibbon herself withdrew and with her the DDF abandoned its dream of being part of the establishment of a national theatre school, “reluctantly passing the ball to the professionally-oriented Canadian Theatre Centre.”<sup>58</sup> By early 1960, even Bourassa was less involved. “The school was set up as...an offshoot of the Dominion Drama Festival,” Bourassa later said in an interview, “and don't let anyone tell you different. It wasn't set up by the ITI or whatever it was, it was through the tenacity and the persistence of...people...in the Dominion Drama Festival...”<sup>59</sup> McGibbon later recalled,

at the very end of all of our work...the DDF...retired from the scene... and this was a real heartbreak to Yves Bourassa, particularly because he had worked so hard.... But the DDF backed away...and gave it to the CTC, and the CTC were able to get finances for the school.<sup>60</sup>

For McGibbon, the summer course at Stratford was at least a way to maintain some kind of relationship between the amateur and professional theatre communities, as well as a way to acknowledge the amateur theatre movement from which the idea of the NTS had sprung.<sup>61</sup>

Still, another question discussed at this point had to do with whether “it would be possible to organize a refresher course for existing professional theatre people in Canada”<sup>62</sup> and whether such a course would be useful. Saint-Denis believed that a six-week summer course for professionals was not a sufficient amount of time to be useful. He “suggested that this question...be left aside and reintroduced later when... the School is in full operation.”<sup>63</sup>

Saint-Denis’ presence insured that the Committee finally understood that “after many meetings and discussions on the subject,” the School would be based both in Montreal with summers in Stratford. It was also from this meeting on that the School name was being changed from “The Canadian School of Dramatic Art,”<sup>64</sup> to “The National School”<sup>65</sup> with “The National School of Dramatic Art”<sup>66</sup> another possibility. As well, Saint-Denis’ title was agreed on at this time as Artistic Advisor. He agreed to meet with the Board at least once a year, and anytime “in case of crisis.”<sup>67</sup> Gardner noted that since the School was a professional institution, Saint-Denis would receive an honourarium at least compensating for his time. Indeed, a working budget was to be ready by Christmas under Pelletier’s control. It was at that point as well that McGibbon and Gardner were asked to put together notes on the planning process for a brief history which would be ultimately published as part of the Blueprint. Clearly, a lot was happening.

Very late in the November discussions, Bourassa returned to the use of the term “bilingual,” feeling it was misleading. He argued that the School should be called a “two-language School.”<sup>68</sup> Saint-Denis did not disagree with Bourassa. As he explained it yet again,

the purpose of the School is not that students should initially and superficially speak both languages, even it may happen on occasion. The main purpose of the School is that both theatrical traditions should be cultivated on a parallel line and side by side. Connections may come only after the student is formed in his own tradition. Some of the courses will be given in common: for example, the movement courses and the voice production courses (but not including diction). After the first year, some inter-relation may be organized. One way of organizing such inter-relation would be to make the French students attend the work of the

English students and vice-versa... exchanges should be organized on that basis, and then multiplied during the third year.<sup>69</sup>

Saint-Denis urged that each linguistic group study writers from the other tradition. For instance, English students would be introduced to classical French authors such as Molière, Corneille, and Racine in English. Later they should see those works done by the French students. The same would happen for the French students with English classics. “In short,” the minutes read, “Michel St. Denis expressed the unanimous opinion of the meeting by stating that the bilingual character of the School would be realized by the fact that the two parallel trainings would take part in it.”<sup>70</sup>

Gratien Gélinas suggested the School have two equal Artistic Directors, one for each language, and that there also be a single, bilingual Director-General in charge overall, “knowledgeable of both... artistic points of view.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the unstated hope was that Saint-Denis himself would leave Juilliard and become the Canadian School’s first Director-General.<sup>72</sup>

The planners agreed as well that a Board of Governors should be formed consisting of 25 people. The Board would be responsible for the finances of the School, its physical operation, and its national vision. It was stressed that the Board would not have any real artistic responsibility, and that there be at least one board member from each province. Tom Patterson suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board serve two-year terms while the other governors be appointed for one year.

By December, Saint-Denis had thought of additional issues. “I do not know exactly how to plan the technical courses between the English and the French sides,”<sup>73</sup> he wrote to Gardner. “I don’t think that they approach design in the same way: must we plan two designers? The English paint on a frame and the French on the floor; do the Canadians do the same and should we have two scene painters?”<sup>74</sup> Once again, the traditional differences between the English and



French cultures were surfacing, and with it the question of Canada's own artistic heritage.

Gardner responded to Saint-Denis after informal conversations with some of the others:

I believe the design traditions are far less marked in Canada between French and English than between the parent countries. At the School, for instance, I think students should learn how to paint scenery both on the floor and on a paint frame. Design influences are becoming international and quickly known. The Gallic artist will of course see life in a Gallic way, and the Gaelic in a Gaelic way, but designers in Canada are perhaps the ones that will bridge the bilingual barrier most easily. They should not be restricted to their own tradition, but be allowed to refresh their own tradition from the many other art influences current.<sup>75</sup>

Saint-Denis then asked about staffing,

particularly for the acting course first year. If we do not find the suitable teachers on the spot and have to bring those from outside, then they will have to be permanent. Finally...concerning the production expenses: they are not accounted for. I believe that a separate budget should be prepared, including making and running expenses. I do not [know] Canadian costs. I suppose you can estimate by yourself the increase in salaries and materials which will come from the shows?<sup>76</sup>

By December 15, Jean Gascon's name was being floated as Artistic Director on the French side to match Powys Thomas on the English side. Since Gascon was busy as an actor and director at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, his partner Jean-Louis Roux agreed to make him available for the School's first year.<sup>77</sup> Saint-Denis' opinion was again sought but he could offer little since he did not really know Gascon or his work.

## **Facilities and Faculty**

Other key decisions were made at this time. A building was proposed in Outremont on Rockland Street, at the time owned by the Dominican Fathers who wanted to sell or rent it. Roux was asked to find out the real purchase price of the building, as well as some idea of how much it would cost to maintain. "The physical requirements of the building are extensive and the Rockland Street building may not be adequate, but at least for budget purposes we would have

some figures to work with,”<sup>78</sup> wrote Gardner. Saint-Denis had earlier asked for architectural blueprints of the Rockland Street building with the thought of possibly doing some renovations on the building. Gardner responded by admitting that the space was far from satisfactory, saying that if chosen, “we would have to exist in makeshift quarters for the first year...and use that time to scout and renovate another and more satisfactory site for the second year.”<sup>79</sup> The planners ultimately did not choose the Rockland building and continued to search for the right one.

As part of the budget process, Saint-Denis provided the planners with a list of essential staff: two artistic directors— an improvisation instructor, a stage director, a designer, a business manager, a secretary, a caretaker, and a cleaner. He also proposed twenty part-time instructors— some bilingual—including a voice teacher, a pianist, and teachers of acrobatics, make-up, fencing, carpentry, wardrobe, design, several academic lecturers, and tech people.<sup>80</sup> As Gardner wrote:

Yves [Bourassa] can use it as the basis for his brief to the Quebec Provincial Government explaining that plans are still in the process of evolution, and that formal requests and acceptance of money will come from the Board of Governors. Then we suggest that the Quebec members get together and discuss it, and we in Toronto will do the same thing...Then early in January perhaps... we would have a detailed final meeting on the Blueprint budget and names for the Board of Governors, Staff, real estate, etc....Following the ratification....official overtures would be made to our prospective Chairman of the Board of Governors...and formal requests for monies (Ontario and other Provinces) made, and the hiring of staff, rental of a building etc. begun.<sup>81</sup>

By mid-January, 1960, a draft of the final Blueprint was complete and circulated for further suggestions and edits. Gardner sent a copy to Saint-Denis noting that there were changes to the preliminary Blueprint, “none of which I hope are too drastic.”<sup>82</sup> Included were “such things as changing the particularly continental term ‘Director-General’ to a more North American ‘Executive Director’, and a broader, inclusive title for the technical and advanced courses (General Production Course).”<sup>83</sup> Gardner also noted that an “Advanced Production

Management Course...which we barely discussed,” had been added in and a detailed budget based on “Saint-Denis’ list of staff... and physical needs.”<sup>84</sup> He also requested that Saint-Denis provide him with any suggested changes by January 29, about 10 days before the next official meeting.

Saint-Denis expressed his approval of the draft, writing “may I congratulate you? I find it very clear and impressive.”<sup>85</sup> Yet he still had many notes to give. For instance, he did not like the fact that the titles of the courses began with the word “General” (i.e. “General Acting Course,” “General Production Course”), explaining that it obscured their meaning too much.<sup>86</sup> He specifically noted this was not good for the production course since it also included design, which was different from actual production aspects. He suggested just writing “Acting Course” and “Technical Courses in Design and Production Management,” “if [that] expresses exactly what you want.”<sup>87</sup>

In the same letter, Gardner asked if Saint-Denis would take the title Executive Director. It was clear that this position held authority, but what Saint-Denis was not sure about was the real role within the functioning of the School. An Executive Director, he said,

appears to me as a bad cog in the machine; you give him authority in artistic matters, but who is he? Does he teach? Where will his authority over your two artistic directors come from? I see him at present as a source of division much more than as a promoter of unity. You must not think of me for the function. It appears most unlikely that I could do it, even for a year.<sup>88</sup>

Saint-Denis was more interested in the acting courses. He wanted to see first-year students working on full-length plays “so as to make them always consider the whole....Only for exercises on Speech Delivery of big styles are we obliged to make them limit their objective, because of the difficulty, but this is the exception.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, this was a way to situate the student within an ensemble, as opposed to inadvertently contributing to the star-system, and to

train the student to acknowledge the functions of his or her role within the context of the entire play and its theatrical style. He also said that

I am frightened by the difficulties of all kinds we are going to be faced with when we have to organize the transfer from Montreal to Stratford; part-time teaching, expenses for the School and for the students, lodgings, etc... This must be studied in full before anything is announced, because it might involve special arrangements with an influence on the budget and on organization.<sup>90</sup>

In the final Blueprint, many significant changes—many proposed by Saint-Denis—were in fact made. The School, for instance, would no longer be called “The Canadian School of Dramatic Art,” but instead, “The National Theatre School of Canada,” and it would be located in Montreal for eight months of the year, from November to June, and in Stratford for two months, July and August.<sup>91</sup> It was also noted that there was a new opening date, November 1960.<sup>92</sup> Other specific edits were made to provide clarity and specificity: in one example, the final version says that graduates of the School would receive a certificate confirming their completion of the program and not a diploma.

Regarding faculty, Powys Thomas acknowledged that it was difficult to find bilingual people.<sup>93</sup> Another issue had to do with Litz Pisk who was willing to teach movement for one year during which she would also train someone to eventually replace her. Thomas was aware that Saint-Denis and Pisk<sup>94</sup> had significant differences.<sup>95</sup> Physical theatre and Commedia dell’Arte teacher, Carlo Mazzone-Clementi, was another question mark. “I do not know [him] myself,”<sup>96</sup> Thomas wrote to Saint-Denis.

But my small knowledge of working with him and being in close quarters with him during six weeks of last summer in Stratford would prompt me to say ‘yes’...I think in an organized school he would be alright. I certainly get on with him very well.... I personally will speak very highly of Mazzone as a teacher—perceptive, instinctive, human, patient with a very wide and healthy philosophy which he brings to his teaching. I paint him in bright colours—sincerely, but also in an attempt to clear away the doubts you have about him....certainly Mazzone being on the staff would ease the budget—as he would span movement, improvisation, and acrobatics.<sup>97</sup>

Thomas explained that while Pisk could teach movement leading into dance, Mazzone could teach movement leading into improvisation, and a separate instructor to teach period dancing needed part-time. No decision to hire them was yet made.

## **The Final Blueprint**

With a “Forward” by CTC President David Ongley, the final, 77-page Blueprint of the National Theatre School of Canada was approved and issued on February 8, 1960. It begins with a summation of the discussions and debates since the planning officially started in 1957 and a statement of need.

To meet the needs of Canada’s theatre this country must train its own artists and workers. No longer can its purposes be adequately served by sending students abroad for training. If a national expression through theatre is to be achieved, then that training must be on a national level and a matter of national concern.<sup>98</sup>

The final Blueprint states officially that the School would have two separate sections—one for French and one for English students—with the common goal of training actors, directors, and designers for the emerging professional theatre. It was stated that the hope was that this cultural exchange would enrich both linguistic communities. To be located in Montreal (November to June) and in Stratford (July and August), the School would begin its first year with an acting program only with a production program to open the following year. The School would charge a tuition fee with scholarships to be provided wherever possible. There would be no degree or diploma given, simply a certificate to acknowledge completion of the program. The curriculum would teach traditional and modern theatre, and would encourage students to experiment with new forms including media such as film, radio, and television. By the third year, a theatre company of senior students and graduates would be attached to the School along with

aspiring playwrights. Playwriting—though not in the initial curriculum—was seen as an important long-term goal.

For the School's opening in November 1960, approximately 30 full-time students between 18 and 22 years of age would be chosen to enter the acting program, while a special summer course in Stratford (for amateur directors and actors who were not enrolled at NTS) would have 40 students. The second year would see 30 additional students admitted to the acting program along with 15 new students in production. By the third year of operations, 1963-1964, there would be a total of 115 full-time students (80 acting students and 35 production students). Tuition fees for NTS students were set at \$700 per year with summer course registration at \$200.<sup>99</sup>

According to the Blueprint, the School would operate from a rented building in Montreal renovated to its specifications (estimated to cost \$50,000) and including a small theatre.<sup>100</sup> An additional \$50,000 was budgeted for salaries and operating costs.<sup>101</sup> Overall, a \$120,000 first-year budget was estimated with \$30,000 to be covered by tuition fees.<sup>102</sup> By 1964, the annual budget was expected to rise to \$220,000, with \$90,000 recovered in fees.<sup>103</sup> It was also acknowledged that the School would need subsidies from both public and private organizations.<sup>104</sup>

It was noted that the School would have a teaching faculty of anglophone, francophone, and bilingual instructors and would be governed by a national Board of Governors with Michel Saint-Denis as Artistic Advisor to both the staff and Board. The Board of Governors would consist of a Chair, two Vice-Chair, and 15 to 25 active members.<sup>105</sup> The Chair would be selected by the Canadian Theatre Centre's planning Committee and serve for two years, unpaid.<sup>106</sup> The two Vice-Chairs, invited by the Chair, would also serve for two years. It was assumed that the

Chair's position would alternate between English-speaking and French-speaking members.<sup>107</sup>

The Board of Governors would include at least one representative from each province. Members of the Board would serve for a renewable term of one year.<sup>108</sup> According to the Blueprint,

when the School is incorporated the Board of Governors will...be responsible for its...policies, its financial position, its promotion, and its operating procedures. The Board will also be responsible for the formal hiring of the teaching staff, as recommended by the Executive and Artistic Directors.<sup>109</sup>

Ultimately, the final Blueprint would "serve as a guide to the Board"<sup>110</sup> in matters of artistic policy. Although the CTC would not be directly involved in the School's operations, it would remain a source of artistic guidance.

The school year would be divided into three terms with the first term from November 1 to February 28 (with a Christmas break). The second term would be from March 1 to June 30. The third term, held in Stratford, would be run from July 1 to August 31. It would operate in conjunction with, but totally separate from a special four to six week summer course for amateurs.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, the Blueprint clearly reflects the details of the acting program that was discussed between Saint-Denis and members of the various Committees. Actors would receive broad training in "every phase of the actor's art."<sup>112</sup> "It is the aim of the school," the Blueprint notes, "to acquaint them with all aspects and all periods of theatre, and to develop in them a creative approach to the great theatrical styles of the past and present, so that they might bring reality to their performance of any one of them."<sup>113</sup> The Blueprint says that emphasis would be put on the actor's technical skills since

a young actor should have at his disposal a broad range of techniques—he should be able to use his body, his voice and his imagination to their best advantage. He should be able not only to act plays of various styles, but to improvise, to sing, to dance, to mime, to perform acrobatic tricks. At the same time, those techniques should always be considered as the servants of his dramatic imagination, and not be allowed to dominate as empty skills. While he should be well trained in

improvisation where his personal invention is given scope, the young actor should be trained to become the faithful interpreter of great plays, and this cannot be achieved, whatever his gifts, without the necessary cultural background. The School, therefore, will attempt to enrich his background.<sup>114</sup>

Clearly, Saint-Denis was reiterating the importance of training the actor with a wide-range of technical skills, but he was also suggesting that talent alone was not enough to carry the student's creative work toward the high level of standards that the NTS sought to achieve. He emphasized that the aim of the curriculum should not be to turn actors into technical machines, but rather to develop imaginative interpreters and creators through a deeper understanding and awareness of the cultural contexts from which their work derived. "If stars are produced," the Saint-Denis Blueprint states, "it will be the natural result of talent and work."<sup>115</sup>

The final Blueprint breaks down the curriculum further by explaining the purpose and focus of each year for the acting students. Much of this had already been decided on in previous conversations with Saint-Denis. The first year was the year to "tune the instrument."<sup>116</sup> "The actor will not be concerned with the performance of plays, but rather with what it is to act as opposed to reciting or reading. However, at the beginning of the first year plays will be rehearsed to serve as a point of departure and evaluation for the students and staff."<sup>117</sup> The year would be mainly devoted to improvisation, including what was considered one of the most challenging forms of improvisation, silent improvisations with and without mask. The students would then study style—comic, tragic, and realistic—as well as attend lectures in history, literature or the arts "to arouse the students' imaginative understanding of the great periods in drama..."<sup>118</sup> First year students would eventually come into contact with mime, choral speeches, comic improvisation, poems, songs, and dances from different periods.<sup>119</sup>

The second year would introduce them to aspects of production (including stage-management and backstage work), as well as to acting in radio, film, and television. The last year



would see the creation of the School's own theatre company. The Blueprint called for two companies, one in English and one in French. They would each do a brief two month tour in Ontario and Quebec prior to the beginning of year four.

Only the most accomplished of the advanced students would be employed in this company, and it might be augmented by a few professionals.... The theatre company is not designed in any way to compete with existing professional companies, but as an extension of the School training.<sup>120</sup>

## **Production and Directing**

For the production and directing courses, beginning a year later, there would be no age limit for applicants with a broad educational background listed as an asset. In design, previous training in painting and drawing would be required.<sup>121</sup> Directing applicants would need to prepare a production analysis built around a script. It was noted as well that experienced students would possibly be exempted from first year technical training. "In this case," the Blueprint notes, "a rigid examination would be set."<sup>122</sup>

Production students would learn the basic technical elements of stagecraft, painting, carpentry, property making, dyeing, creating a prompt book, stage-managing, changing scenery, lighting, and costume-making.<sup>123</sup> The hope was to give students opportunities to observe and learn from professional technicians. Production students too would be required to study the history of drama, customs, arts and styles, but also "the history of the structural and mechanical development of the various stage forms from a technical point of view."<sup>124</sup> Indeed, the specific history course for production students would still relate directly to the acting course and the study of style, as well as forms of realism, "so that the training of technicians is not abstracted or isolated from the theatre as a whole, or from the actors and the dramatic texts."<sup>125</sup> In other words, the aim of the School's training as a whole was to be the continuous exchange not only of

culture, but of understanding theatre as a synthesis of all the arts and would be “designed... to avoid and correct the custom of separating technical practice from the drama itself, and to create instead technicians with an artistic as well as a technical approach.”<sup>126</sup>

The advanced directing course clearly reflected Saint-Denis’ sense that “a director must know what it is to act, and he should have experience as an actor.”<sup>127</sup> Directing students would also be required to learn management and costing of a production, as well as how to make a model set and work with blueprints. “Directors will then learn to apply their knowledge of stagecraft and the history of theatre, the drama, and their study of plays and styles, to the conceiving, planning and preparation of productions.”<sup>128</sup>

The Blueprint says that design students would also need to be familiar with acting, directing, and technical courses “with regard particularly to the study of texts and styles and the history of drama, customs and art.”<sup>129</sup> Designers would also be required to study architecture and the development of the stage. The best of the design students would become responsible for designing the School’s major productions and in the final year, those considered most talented would go to the Stratford Festival to apprentice for the professional staff. Their experience would include preparing costumes, stage properties and scenery. Design students would also possibly be exposed to aspects of film and television and how to apply design for those mediums.<sup>130</sup>

Although there would not be a playwriting program as such in the beginning, it was recommended to possibly have “special exercise scenes” written for the students by playwrights who might be attached to the school.<sup>131</sup>

For the summer course for amateurs, the DDF was expected to be “instrumental in screening applications... in their regional festival zones.”<sup>132</sup> According to the Blueprint, “the Special Summer Course would make no attempt to produce professionals for the theatre. It is

designed to introduce amateur directors, actors and production personnel to the teaching methods of the School and provide them with condensed courses of training.”<sup>133</sup> The summer students would train in small “acting groups... corresponding to miniature theatre companies, composed of directors, actors and technicians.”<sup>134</sup> In the final week of the course, students would present a small production. Although no scholarships would be offered for the summer group, it was suggested that such funds might be raised through the DDF.<sup>135</sup> It was also suggested that if a student showed talent and “advanced ability,”<sup>136</sup> a six-month to one year scholarship might be arranged. Indeed, at this point in the Blueprint it is apparent that the organizers were trying to maintain a relationship with the DDF as much as possible.

One final course being considered was for professionals who were seeking to upgrade and maintain skills. “Recognizing the desire of professionals already active in the professional theatrical media,” the Blueprint states, “for ‘refresher’, and advanced training the school will hope to consider in the future a special advanced or intermediate course on a part-time basis.”<sup>137</sup> The course would be conducted on a weekly basis either during the regular school year or in conjunction to the special summer course for amateurs. Some members of the teaching staff would be given the opportunity to work privately with professional students part-time as an “organized and encouraged...service to the professional theatre, and a source of additional income to the teaching staff.”<sup>138</sup>

Clearly, immense thought went into developing the curriculum for the NTS with hope that it would produce theatre people of talent and skill who would eventually contribute to the development of the Canadian theatre on a professional level.

The existence of a complete school of theatre is only justified if the students coming out of all branches of the School, and finding their living in the performing arts, can have the hope of finding more and more outlets through which they will be able to practice the kind of theatrical art they have been trained

in. The School must therefore be in close touch with the growing number of theatrical organizations which exist across Canada. By training young professional artists the School will effectively strengthen those organizations, and it will make it possible for more Canadian theatres to be established, in which traditional as well as the best contemporary and experimental drama can be performed.<sup>139</sup>

Budget was still the biggest unknown in the Blueprint. “Any estimate of the cost for operating the School,” it states,

is at this time an informed guess. It is possible to set out the physical and staff requirements of the School in general outlines but until a site for the School in Montreal has been established—either rented or purchased—and until the facilities at Stratford have been officially made available to the School, it will not be possible to know what capital expenditures will be involved.<sup>140</sup>

With regard to staff,

while it is possible to say what teaching will have to be done it is not possible to say exactly how many teachers will be required to do it, since obviously some teachers will be bilingual and others will not be, and some teachers will be versatile, instructing in several courses, while others will be specialists.<sup>141</sup>

Nevertheless, with only months until the School’s opening, the organizers discussed budgets with minimum estimates of the expenses that would likely be incurred prior to the School’s opening that year, as well as long-range estimates for the first four years.

Indeed, the hope was still alive that a building would be acquired for their exclusive use by the time the School opened. Included in the expenditures and capital costs were rent and maintenance fees, offices, a gymnasium, multiple classrooms, and a stage and auditorium, totaling \$37,500.<sup>142</sup> The first summer at Stratford would cost \$11,000.<sup>143</sup> Administrative expenses, which included legal and financial matters such as insurance, workmen’s compensation, bank fees, travel and publicity costs, and the hiring of a Business Manager prior to the School’s opening added \$24,025 to the expenditures.<sup>144</sup> The total preliminary cost for

building and administrative expenses prior to the School's opening was therefore an estimated \$61,525. This was based on the assumption that a permanent building would be acquired.

The preliminary budget only included staff that would need to be present before operations began to prepare for and oversee the School's opening—the Executive Director and the two Artistic Directors. The Executive Director, said the Blueprint, would have to be bilingual and would be an ex-officio member of the Board of Governors. He would receive \$6,000 prior to the first year operations and \$12,000 once the first term started. The two Artistic Directors would each run their own sections of the School and receive \$9,000 each prior to opening and \$18,000 when operations began.<sup>145</sup> The Business Manager, bilingual, would manage the School's budgeting and business operations and receive \$3,500 prior to opening and \$7,500 in year one.

In all these areas, bilingual staff was the great unknown. Could they really find people who could deal with both languages? Could they afford it? Every document would also need to be translated.

Biculturalism within an institution might be compared to a see-saw. Too much weight on either one could cause the other to slide off.... [T]he School's bi-cultural character can only be maintained if the two languages are represented more or less equally. As the cost of operating each language section is virtually the same, the budget must be divided equally between the two language groups....The School must not only preserve a precarious balance between the two language groups at all levels of its activities, but it must not appear to the members of either group to be dominated by the other.<sup>146</sup>

While a full-time bilingual voice instructor could be hired for \$6,000, a diction teacher, needed for each language group, would cost \$10,000.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, the organizers continued the laborious task of trying to balance finances with the School's bi-cultural mandate.

That said, it was assumed that in the first year the teaching staff would begin with four permanent positions and eight part-time instructors, but the number would gradually increase in size to 15 permanent staff and nine part-time in the fourth year.<sup>148</sup> For the first year, the staff

would cost \$55,880 and include one full-time improvisation teacher, four part-time instructors for diction, voice, and movement, a part-time Head of Wardrobe and part-time Head of Carpentry (likely to prepare for the production course to be available by 1961), as well as some lecturers.<sup>149</sup> Though the production course was not to begin until 1961, the planners clearly saw it necessary to prepare for it by hiring in advance bilingual master instructors. Aspects of performance training such as acrobatics, which Saint-Denis stressed were important, would only be incorporated into the curriculum after the School's first year of operations. By 1961, the acting and production courses, together, would require a faculty of nearly 30 and cost \$94,700, which would rise to \$122,500 by 1964 with more part-time instructors needed for additional classes such as for television and radio.<sup>150</sup> Despite the financial struggles, the budgets for staff for the first four years of operations demonstrate expectations that interest and financial support in the School would continue to grow.

In the end, total costs for year one were \$91,355; year two \$115,475; year three \$138,670, and year four \$126,000.<sup>151</sup> With some sense of the School's expenses finally on paper, income estimates had to follow starting with a \$700 tuition fee for each student, and a \$200 fee for participants of the special summer course. In tuition alone, the School could only generate \$29,000 in the first year, a figure growing to \$92,000 by fourth year.<sup>152</sup> For the rest, the plan was to apply to the Canada Council, provincial governments, municipal agencies (i.e. Montreal Arts Council), corporations, arts unions, foundations, and private sector benefactors. The planners also hoped to find established professionals in the theatre, in Canada and abroad, to offer financial support.<sup>153</sup>

With the realities of the School's establishment becoming clearer to the planners through a final Blueprint, so did the need to acquire the necessary support on which the plans for the NTS

depended. Conversations and decisions among the School's organizers, particularly surrounding the creation of a curriculum reveal the hopes and expectations that such a school signified for Canada, and at the same time suggest some of the political risks in such a pursuit. The next chapter will look at how the Blueprint was ultimately implemented, the opening of the School, and aspects of its first year of operation.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 10, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Transcript of a conversation with Michel Saint-Denis, Powys Thomas, Vincent Tovell, Donald Davis, and Pauline McGibbon in New York, November 10-December 10 (no year), 3, File 60, Crest Theatre Collection, Marilyn and Charles Baillie Special Collections Centre, Toronto Reference Library.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> By the term “Style,” Saint-Denis was referring to the form (visual and textual) given to a theatrical work, as informed by the work’s historical and cultural context from which it derived. For Saint-Denis, in order to achieve a certain level of “authenticity” or “reality” in the theatre—that is, *artistic* reality—one must acknowledge the Style in which a play is written, and create within it, so to allow for a new, poetic reality using the language of the theatre. This “artistic reality” would be different from what he called “human reality,” which refers specifically to everyday life outside of the theatre. Style, Saint-Denis emphasized, is what distinguishes the two realities and translates the writer’s inner thoughts and life into theatrical expression.

<sup>5</sup> Transcript of a conversation with Michel Saint-Denis, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> “A Preliminary Outline for the establishment of a National Bi-lingual School for the Theatrical Arts,” 13 June, 1959, 2-3, MS 81229, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, British Library.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 25, 1959, 8, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “Memorandum Concerning the Establishment of a National School for the Dramatic Arts,” August 14, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> David Gardner, letter to Jean Gascon and Jean-Louis Roux, August 14, 1959, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, August 18, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>22</sup> “Memorandum,” August 14, 1959, 1.

<sup>23</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, August 18, 1959, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to McGibbon, August 22, 1959, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>25</sup> Saint-Denis, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Gardner, letter to Malcolm Black, August 27, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



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- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>29</sup> Powys Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, September 1, 1959, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Thomas, October 6, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>33</sup> “Preliminary Blueprint,” n.d., 2, F0359, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 5.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 9.
- <sup>52</sup> David Ongley, letter to Vincent Massey, November 5, 1959, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>53</sup> Massey, letter to Ongley, November 10, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>54</sup> Peter Dwyer, letter to Ongley, November 12, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>55</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 1.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Although the DDF had the financial support of various patrons such as Vincent Massey, Lord Bessborough, Lady Eaton, and other philanthropists, as well as corporations such as the Calvert Distillers Ltd. and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, the DDF struggled with finances until its demise in 1978. According to Betty Lee, the financial problems were not just in the administrative expenses, theatre rentals, promotional material, and billeting, but also from the fact that the Festival took place across Canada and required the participants to travel, forcing many groups to request financial help from DDF executives (*Love and Whiskey*, 178). Getting adjudicators, particularly from outside of Canada, would have also been costly for the DDF. Indeed, it can be argued that both of these circumstances—amateur groups unable to attend some

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of the Festivals and the costly expenses to bring in bilingual adjudicators each time—could have been a factor in the perpetuation of the Festival’s cultural politics.

<sup>58</sup> Betty Lee, *Love and Whiskey: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*, (McClland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1973), 205-206.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Yves Bourassa, [Sound Recording], n.d., R5415-0-1-E, Theatre Canada Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Pauline McGibbon, [Sound Recording], n.d., Theatre Canada Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>61</sup> According to Betty Lee, the DDF never really got over the fact that the CTC was credited with the founding of the NTS, especially Bourassa, who claimed that it was him and other DDF colleagues such as Jean Pelletier who made the project possible since they were the ones who got the Quebec government’s support (206).

<sup>62</sup> Meeting Minutes, October 26, 1959, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> No explanation or additional details regarding the change in the school name could be found in any of the archives.

<sup>65</sup> At this time, the School was still not being referred to as the “National Theatre School of Canada.”

<sup>66</sup> Meeting Minutes, November 28, 1959, 1, 8, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gardner, December 12, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Gardner, letter to Saint-Denis, January 16, 1959, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>76</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gardner, December 12, 1959.

<sup>77</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gardner, December 15, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>78</sup> Gardner, letter to Saint-Denis, January 16, 1959, 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Saint-Denis, letter with list of requirements to Gardner, December 12, 1959, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>81</sup> Gardner, letter to Roux, December 18, 1959, 2-3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>82</sup> Gardner, letter to Saint-Denis, January 16, 1960, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gardner, February 2, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gardner, February 5, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Blueprint edits/notes, n.d., 1, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>92</sup> No clear explanation for why the opening date was delayed by two months was found in the archives, though it could have been because a building was yet to be secured by the time the final Blueprint was ratified in February. Also, it could be that the planners were thinking ahead and wanted to be able to give students a two month break between the summer and fall terms, and if the summer course went until August, a November start to the year was the most suitable option.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, January 31, 1959, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>94</sup> Litz Pisk was an Austrian movement teacher and designer who, after designing for Bertolt Brecht's Vienna premiere of *The Rise and Fall of the City Mahagonny*, left for England in 1933 where she would teach (movement) alongside Michel Saint-Denis at the Old Vic (George Hall, "Obituary: Litz Pisk," *Independent*, 1997). Considering that Pisk and Saint-Denis both grew up training and working in the European theatre, including in England, and that no sources specifically point to reasons for why Saint-Denis and Pisk did not get along, it is difficult to assess what exactly their "differences" were. It could just be that they had personal issues with one another stemming from different training approaches. Saint-Denis was particularly adamant about a staff that shared a unified vision for actor training.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> "A Plan for the Establishment of the National Theatre School of Canada-École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada," February 8, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>114</sup> Ibid., 21-22.  
<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 22.  
<sup>116</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 23.  
<sup>118</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 25.  
<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 26.  
<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 29.  
<sup>122</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 30.  
<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 31.  
<sup>125</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>126</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 32.  
<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 33.  
<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 35.  
<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 36.  
<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 37-38.  
<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 39.  
<sup>133</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 40.  
<sup>135</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>136</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>137</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>138</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 42-43.  
<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 54.  
<sup>141</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>142</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>143</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>144</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>145</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>146</sup> “Bilingualism and Biculturalism,” Brief submitted to Royal Commission, n.d., 7-9, F0453, Herbert Whittaker Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.  
<sup>147</sup> “A Plan for the Establishment,” 58.  
<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 52.  
<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 58.  
<sup>150</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 59.  
<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 60.  
<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

# Chapter Five

## Opening the Doors: Problems and Perseverance (1960)

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### A Brief Chronology

#### 1960

- March. Quebec announces a \$50,000 grant to what is now being called the National Theatre School. Montreal will be its home.
  - May 30. A press conference is held in Montreal with Saint-Denis formally announcing the School's creation.
  - Newspapers such as the *Globe and Mail* and the *Montreal Gazette* publish major articles.
  - Summer. The School faculty starts getting hired. The Board of Governors expands. Auditions are announced and student applications open. James Domville is named Administrative Director. A building at 1191 Mountain Street in Montreal is confirmed as the School's first home.
  - Tom Patterson agrees to become Chair of the Board of Governors. Officially approved is the name "The National Theatre School of Canada – l'École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada." National auditions begin. Jean Gascon of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde agrees to become Executive Director.
  - September. Jean Pierre Ronfard is named Artistic Director for the French section.
  - The School selects 31 students for admission: 17 English-speaking and 14 French-speaking. The Canada Council announces a \$40,000 grant for the School.
  - November 2. The National Theatre School is officially opened by Michel Saint-Denis.
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This chapter traces the final months leading up to the School's official opening in November 1960. More specifically, it examines new and recurrent problems in the planning process, which ultimately left many issues unresolved even as the School opened its doors. Previous histories of the NTS generally acknowledge that the School suffered hardships, but most are concerned with the period after it began its operations. *Why* was the School still facing major problems after its opening, especially after years of planning? Decisions that were made prior to its establishment are given short shrift, yet those details point to the fundamental

conflicts inherent in the whole planning process and suggest notable reasons to explain why the School continued to face life-threatening issues.

## **In Search of a Chairman and a Board**

After three years of meetings, discussions, and investigations, the organizers of the new School were finally going to get to see their vision realized. Their Blueprint was ready, but there were still details to finalize including budgets, acquiring a physical location for the School, appointing the Board of Governors, hiring faculty, creating student admissions and funding applications, as well as preparing for the press, and they had only months to get it all done. Certainly, knowing the Quebec government was ready to support the project helped the planners stay on track. In a letter to Yves Bourassa and Jean Pelletier, David Ongley wrote that it all seemed “feasible and can be successfully put into operation.”<sup>1</sup>

By mid-March, word was spreading of the new School’s creation and the financial involvement of the Quebec government. In the *Gazette* on March 16, it was noted that Yves Prévost confirmed that the new School would receive a \$50,000 grant and that Jean Gascon of Théâtre du Nouveau Monde might become one of the School’s Artistic Directors.<sup>2</sup>

On March 17, David Gardner wrote Saint-Denis that more and more people were becoming enthusiastic about the whole project.<sup>3</sup> “It seems indeed to be serving the purpose we hoped,”<sup>4</sup> Gardner noted. “People... are not only impressed but excited by the project.”<sup>5</sup> He also mentioned that the Quebec government had just passed a Bill authorizing an “annual gift” of \$50,000 to the School and that they will help find a location in Montreal with financial assistance.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the Canada Council, Gardner said that

they feel that we should combine our preliminary budget (May to November 1960) with our first year budget (November 1960 to November 1961). This would

mean a budget in full of approximately \$200,000. I believe that we can make a request to the Canada Council for a similar grant of \$50,000 to match the generous offer of the Quebec Provincial Government. The move they suggest is to make an application for their May 30<sup>th</sup> meeting for a commitment of this amount to be paid around the opening date of the School (November 1960) by which time we will be able to offer proof that the School will indeed open and will have staff, premises, and 30 students. In other words, the Canada Council understandably, because it is handling public funds, cannot give them until we can prove that the School will indeed open.<sup>7</sup>

Gardner also met with Davidson Dunton, President of Carleton University, about becoming Board Chair. Dunton declined, however, citing his responsibilities as President of Carleton. Gardner described this as “a real setback,”<sup>8</sup> and the search continued.

Regarding the new key role of the School’s Executive Director, Gardner—speaking for the planning group—suggested Pierre Lefèvre, a pupil and colleague of Saint-Denis from the London Theatre Studio. Indeed, Gardner asked Saint-Denis whether he thought Lefèvre would be interested and if he would be able to leave the Centre de l’Est in Strasbourg without causing any problems there.

He knows Canada [as an adjudicator for the DDF Regionals], is completely bilingual and is, of course, thoroughly grounded in the kind of training you envisage. I cannot think of a better man, save yourself, to head the school. Your advice on this matter I ask you most seriously. I see the position of Executive Director as an artistic one, not only co-ordinating the French and English sections but perhaps heading up the Production Course. (By the way we have retained the word ‘Production’ because in North America it is an all-inclusive word covering direction, design and stage-management, and does not as I understand in France mean only direction).<sup>9</sup>

The Board was also waiting for Saint-Denis to make a decision on Jean Gascon.

We cannot avoid the fact that Jean...[would be] doing this as a stop-gap measure to aid us to open and that he would only be connected with the School in this capacity for probably the first year.... If Pierre Lefèvre were able to head up the School I feel that the French side of the operations would be strong.... this question is of utmost importance and we feel, Powys and I, that only you can make this decision for us as the impartial artistic advisor to the School. Because it is to be a Canadian School I feel that the importation from France would be severely criticized. As I have explained to Powys we must even expect some

criticism of a Welshman heading the English-speaking section. However, a figure like Pierre Lefèvre I know would be acceptable to all.<sup>10</sup>

Still another position to be filled was that of Business Manager. Suggested was James Domville, a bilingual lawyer and, said Gardner, “a budding theatrical impresario in Canada. He is keenly interested in the project and I think has a flair and business acumen that we need to launch the School.”<sup>11</sup> On the financial side, the plan was to get the Ontario government to match Quebec’s \$50,000.<sup>12</sup> The planners would try to raise Ontario money by the late Fall, but until then they could only subsist on Quebec’s and the Canada Council’s help.<sup>13</sup>

Gardner was clearly carrying the ball for the group at this point and was keeping the anglophones and francophones in close communication. He asked Roux to suggest someone for Chair of the Board, noting that “we need a national figure, bilingual and a man whose interests are both artistic and financial.”<sup>14</sup> He then emphasized that they needed to consider—when selecting a Chair—whether to choose someone from Ontario or Quebec. Clearly, the decision would have political implications. Gardner noted that having someone from Ontario in that position might be a good strategy in regard to approaching Ontario for financial support. He also noted that if a Quebec Chair was chosen, the Vice-Chair should be from Ontario.<sup>15</sup>

But time was not on their side. Essentially, they were working without a staff with just months to go. Saint-Denis saw the problem. “C’est grave,”<sup>16</sup> he wrote Jean Pelletier in April of 1960. According to Saint-Denis, they should have announced everything—including staff—in February of 1960 when the Blueprint was approved. The planners agreed to hold a press conference in late May when Saint-Denis could next be in Canada. Saint-Denis wrote to Gardner that “the other urgent questions (auditions – premises) must be tackled with your manager immediately [when] you have him.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, no manager was yet on board. On April 20, Ongley wrote that it was crucial “to obtain our Chairman in order that we may formally and fully



get to work.”<sup>18</sup> The real problem at that point, according to Ongley, was bringing the Board into actual being. In fact, Yves Bourassa—who was recommended by other French-speaking members of the planning Committee—was willing to become acting Chair of the Board if that would help to legally establish it.<sup>19</sup>

By this point, Saint-Denis was beginning to lose patience. In a letter to Ongley on May 16, Saint-Denis asked for confirmation of the press conference. “Time is getting short... for the sake of recruiting good students, it seems to me imperative now not to delay much longer an announcement about the opening and the kind of school envisaged.”<sup>20</sup>

In a letter to Jean-Louis Roux on May 18, Ongley said “the delay in trying to fix the exact date and send out the formal notice is the hope of having a Chairman of the Board present. As you can gather, there have been considerable difficulties in this regard to say the least.”<sup>21</sup> “It is of course,” Ongley added, “absolutely essential to have a press conference and to have Michel present. On the other hand, quite naturally, we would like the press conference to give the School an official start with a nucleus of the Board of Governors.”<sup>22</sup> To assure Saint-Denis that the press conference would happen while he was there, Ongley wrote him on May 20 confirming that the conference would take place on May 30 with or without an official Chair of the Board.<sup>23</sup>

At the press conference, held in Montreal, details outlined in the Blueprint were announced, but the major news—at least in Montreal and Toronto—was Jean Gascon’s<sup>24</sup> appointment as the School’s Executive Director.<sup>25</sup> The *Globe and Mail* and the *Gazette* spread word of some of those details. On May 31, Herbert Whittaker wrote “the two-tongued theatre school is set.”<sup>26</sup> He noted that the staff was under consideration, that the School was receiving grants, and he acknowledged that the curriculum was established by the Canadian Theatre Centre with the help of Saint-Denis.<sup>27</sup> Saint-Denis was quoted as saying that the idea of combining

English and French under one roof was “not just idealistic, but realistic—and it is good for them [Canadians].”<sup>28</sup> “The school must be of top quality,” Whittaker added, “on a level worth the best.”<sup>29</sup>

The *Gazette* reported similar details including a mention of the \$700 tuition fee, the Montreal-Stratford locations, and the leaderships of Saint-Denis, Gascon, Thomas, and Bourassa.<sup>30</sup> “A Canadian school of theatre was born here yesterday,”<sup>31</sup> the *Gazette* noted, suggesting that the official public announcement had been necessary to make the National Theatre School of Canada – École Nationale de Theatre du Canada a reality. In this sense, Saint-Denis was clearly correct in pushing it publicly.

## **Almost There**

While many aspects of the School remained tentative, a decision was taken to release the Canadian Theatre Centre from its duties as governing body of the establishment of the NTS. In a letter to the Canada Council, Ongley confidently explained that as of May 30,

the work of the C.T.C. were turned over to Lt. Col. Yves Bourassa, the acting Chairman of the Board of Governors which is being formed to operate the School. At this same time, a press conference was called outlining the aims and purposes of the School and advising that applications could now be released. Now that the work of C.T.C. is finished, it is of course, the sole task of the Board of Governors to bring the School into being and conduct its operation. Under such circumstances, I would not presume to speak on behalf of the Board of Governors. However, I do feel I can mention that while in Montreal on May 30<sup>th</sup>, I had the opportunity of sitting with Col. Bourassa, Michel Saint-Denis and others and am very happy to report that the appointment of staff, location of building, preparation of calendar, etc., are proceeding apace. It was indeed a very happy moment for those in professional and educational theatre and it is quite obvious the School is being established on the highest level and will have international standing.<sup>32</sup>

Ongley was telling people—specifically those whom they needed—that things were going as planned, despite delays and hiccups with location, funding, and finding a permanent Chair.

On June 7, Gascon wrote to Saint-Denis, noting how well the press conference went.<sup>33</sup> The real problem, Gascon emphasized, was still not having a director for the French section of the School. He made it clear that he would not take the position himself. Gascon urged Saint-Denis to involve himself in the matter more closely.<sup>34</sup>

Saint-Denis agreed to contact people about the position and to look into the hiring of teachers generally. He had already been doing so, noting that Litz Pisk was unlikely available to teach at the School due to commitments in England.<sup>35</sup> Voice teacher Leslie Fyson, according to Saint-Denis, was also unable to commit to the NTS at that point for personal reasons.<sup>36</sup> George Hall was suggested by Saint-Denis as a movement-dance instructor, and possibly a voice teacher as well. It was noted that though Hall was not really bilingual, he had enough French to teach both the English and French sections.<sup>37</sup> Thomas agreed that Hall was “an excellent”<sup>38</sup> choice.

Was there a real leader in the group of NTS planners at this point? Who actually had the final say? It seemed at points there was no one in charge, so in true Canadian fashion, another Committee was organized—this one consisting of Mavor Moore, Gascon, Richard McDonald, and John Hirsch.<sup>39</sup> Its goal was to finally complete the Board of Governors. Of 25 positions, eight still remained unfilled. Moore was quick off the mark suggesting actors Guy Beaulne and Leonard Crainford, Canadian theatre historian Murray Edwards, radio script writer Alice N. Frick, Designer Claire Heffrey, and Director Leon Major. He also suggested representatives from Les Grande Ballets Canadiens, the Montreal Repertory Theatre, the Mountain Playhouse, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and Quebec’s Union des Artistes.<sup>40</sup>

On June 24, Moore published an article in the Toronto *Telegram* outlining details of the School. Titled “Canada’s Theatre School Has National Scope” and written in a question and answer format, the article aimed to provide current public information about the School’s

founding, purpose, and goals. The questions included “Who is behind the school?” “How will it differ from existing schools?” “Exactly what will the school teach?” “What ‘method’ will be used?” “Must a student be bilingual?” “How can a student get into the school?” “How much does it cost?” and “How does one apply?”<sup>41</sup>

Moore noted that those behind the School were from the professional, amateur, and educational theatre across Canada. He credited preliminary work to the CTC and the DDF. He noted that funding was coming from the Canada Council, Stratford, and Quebec. The School, he said, was national in scope with professional training in both English and French. As for the “method” of the School, Moore wrote,

Indoctrination is not the school’s aim. The ‘blueprint’ has been drawn up under the guidance of the School’s Artistic Advisor, Michel Saint-Denis, who has occupied high posts in the theatre-schools of France, Britain and the United States. Students must be prepared for a variety of styles—and in fact this should be one of the greatest assets of a Canadian school of the theatre.<sup>42</sup>

Moore emphasized that the School was seeking to improve the standards of the Canadian theatre as a whole and its artists through training in a wide range of styles and approaches. He also stressed that, as a bi-cultural school, students would not have to be bilingual since there would be two separate sections working simultaneously, with some courses in common. He noted that auditions would be held in August across the country.

Indeed, over the summer, getting such press attention became a priority. On July 13, Ongley wrote to John Bassett, Chair and Publisher of the *Telegram*, asking him if he could provide them with reprints of Moore’s column so they could distribute it to prospective students and supporters.<sup>43</sup> “I know a thousand of these reprints could be very easily distributed,”<sup>44</sup> Ongley wrote.

A brief to the Canada Council was also circulating, as were promotional booklets about the NTS. “We believe,” stated the material,

- that Canada is rich in talent and possibilities for the theatre.
- that the two great cultures of the country—French and English— provide a unique climate for the development of a genuine Canadian Theatre.
- that it is necessary to train artists of quality and integrity in all the crafts of the theatre.
- that the tradition receives nourishment from the deep roots of its tradition.
- that tradition is not an academic imitation of the past, but the real blood-stream of creation coming to us over the centuries.
- that at a time when the dictates of the commercial theatre rarely permit the artists to explore new forms of expression, only experiment will inspire new life into the theatre and assure its survival.<sup>45</sup>

Confidence was growing in the press, but Saint-Denis was getting nervous. He asked Powys Thomas in July about “the quality of applicants. Have you started your auditions and are going to hold them all over the country, as you intended?”<sup>46</sup> Saint-Denis then brought up James Domville, who had declined the earlier offer to be Business Manager of the School. This “worries me also,”<sup>47</sup> he said. Indeed, by that point, there were still many uncertainties.

Even the major funding brief to the Canada Council was not finished and the Board was warned by Peter Dwyer that “it is going to be very difficult to get this item on the agenda, unless you can let me have a finished version within a week [the end of July 1960]. Otherwise, I am afraid the application will have to be left until our October meeting.”<sup>48</sup> Dwyer also suggested that there should be an emphasis on “the important backing which the school has from members of the theatre community throughout Canada,” and “the ability of the Canadian theatre to absorb the students which the school will produce.”<sup>49</sup> “I attach a great deal of importance to this latter point,”<sup>50</sup> he added.

As you know, our theatre is not in too healthy a condition at the present and I, therefore, suggest that some reference to the possibility of a company being formed after some years from the students, together with an indication that the theatre, television and radio can offer work opportunities to graduates, is very important.<sup>51</sup>

## **Mayday, Mayday, Mayday**

On July 27, a meeting was called in Montreal between Bourassa, Gascon, Thomas, and Domville, now on staff as Administrative Director of the School. The purpose of the meeting was “to discuss the serious crisis in the advancement of the plan for establishing the National Theatre School of Canada due to delay in securing a Board of Governors, Charter and the financial means to carry on day to day practical organizational work.”<sup>52</sup> It was agreed among the planners that unless “some real progress could be made immediately, that opening the School as proposed on 2<sup>nd</sup> November would be virtually impossible.”<sup>53</sup>

Gascon, Thomas, and Domville were acknowledged as being “actively at work” despite the project being “severely hampered by the absence of funds and lack of authority for positive action on major questions, due to the absence of a Chairman and a properly constituted Board of Governors.”<sup>54</sup> However, it was also noted that there were already 80 student enquiries regarding the School and at least 12 actual applications since the press conference on May 30 and “excellent publicity.”<sup>55</sup> According to the minutes from that meeting, however, the publicity was mostly in Eastern Canada and better national promotion was needed. The reason given for minimal national publicity was a lack of funds to advertise.<sup>56</sup> As well, two major staff positions still needed to be filled—an Artistic Director for the French Acting Section and a voice teacher.<sup>57</sup> All other positions were penciled in though it was noted that “the School is in the immediate danger of losing its prospective staff if it is unable to present them with actual contracts or binding agreements.”<sup>58</sup>

There was also the issue of having no real office space and secretarial support. As noted in the minutes, “lack of ready cash poses an obstacle in, for example, employing office personnel and in undertaking other activities that cannot be done on a credit basis.”<sup>59</sup> It was acknowledged

that more cash was needed quickly, as well as an authority figure to lead the Board in making important decisions, and the formation of the Board. The Board itself also needed to obtain scholarships, grants, and suitable premises.<sup>60</sup>

More urgently, the planners would not get the \$50,000 from the Quebec government until the School was officially incorporated and had a Board Chair to legally accept the funds. The minutes went on: it is “of the utmost importance that incorporation of the School be accomplished without further delay and that the Treasurer of the Board of Governors be appointed immediately.”<sup>61</sup> Shortly thereafter, a Montreal law firm—Brais & Campbell—was hired and submitted the national incorporation papers.

Until a Chair was found, the Treasurer of the Board would hold all legal authority.<sup>62</sup> At that same meeting, the Canadian Legion Building on 1191 Mountain Street was accepted as the first home for the School. On sale for \$600,000, the planners believed it could eventually bring the School some revenue in rental space.<sup>63</sup> Also,

from the point of view of public relations and publicity and as a tangible reality [it] would be a far more concrete expression to the public of the School’s serious purpose and solid foundation than some temporary rented quarters which at best could only be makeshift.<sup>64</sup>

But could it be bought? It was stressed that unless they secured premises by August 12, the building might well be lost. “Having come thus far,” the minutes stated, “having announced plans to the public, plans that are so close to realization, a delay at this stage could well prove fatal to the School, not only this year but for many years to come.”<sup>65</sup> As feared, no one came forward to buy the building for them. Instead, the planning group agreed to simply rent it for year one.<sup>66</sup> Gascon also provided immediate office space at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde,<sup>67</sup> but clearly space to operate in was an ongoing problem. By the end of the summer, still another office was rented at St. Catherine and St. Denis.<sup>68</sup>

Bourassa was not amused by the delays. He wrote to Mavor Moore and David Ongley, saying that he agreed to act as Chair as a stopgap measure

in order to assure continuity between the work of the Committee and the work of the yet to be formed Board of Governors of the School. Since then, all kinds of circumstances that have amounted to a terrific case of procrastination, has brought about a situation where something definite will have to be done within the next two weeks or else there will be no School. In other words, this letter says in effect: ‘Mayday’, ‘Mayday’, ‘Mayday’...<sup>69</sup>

Nothing was going well. As late as August, the planners still found themselves struggling with incorporation. It turned out that the name of the School had still not been legally approved by Ottawa.<sup>70</sup> Delays like this would not ultimately kill the project, but they certainly made everyone nervous.

The Canada Council application went in on August 2 with an emphasis on the fact that the School had the support of those who were active and/or interested in the professional and educational theatre across Canada, and that the School would enable graduates to find work in Canada. Ongley’s covering letter underscored several of these points, particularly the “need of producers for properly trained personnel.”<sup>71</sup>

It was the opinion of this ‘theatre community’ that only such a school could properly strengthen and expand existing organizations, as well as be the means for the creation of new companies on the highest professional level.... It was pointed out that despite any from year to year ‘ups and downs’ of theatre in Canada, there was always room for skilled personnel. Expression was given that the addition of such highly trained actors and technicians would, in its turn, create a better theatre leading to still greater demand for such personnel.<sup>72</sup>

## **The Sky Brightens**

On August 8, Powys Thomas informed Saint-Denis that they finally had their Chair—Tom Patterson.<sup>73</sup> “The best choice—that should have been made months ago. He works and will work.”<sup>74</sup> He also told Saint-Denis that the NTS name had also been approved and the School was



now officially incorporated: “We Exist!”<sup>75</sup> Auditions across Canada were scheduled to take place from September 7 to 24.<sup>76</sup>

On August 18, Thomas again asked Saint-Denis to find them an Artistic Director for the French Acting Section, which Thomas stressed needed to come from France since they could not find a Canadian of the desired calibre.<sup>77</sup> Clearly, foreign help was crucial if the NTS was to maintain a skills level acceptable to Saint-Denis. Thomas also noted that there were still some other uncertainties. For instance, the availability of the Canadian Legion building was still not confirmed, nor was the \$50,000 contribution from Quebec. In fact, the new Premier of Quebec, Jean Lesage, now wanted to wait to give the money until the Ontario government gave the same amount.<sup>78</sup> Thomas then admitted that west of Winnipeg, no one knew of the School’s existence and he emphasized it was due to a lack of advertising money.<sup>79</sup> He added, however, that supportive individuals including theatre director John Hirsch and teachers Florence James and Dorothy Somerset were helping spread the word as much as possible.<sup>80</sup>

By that point, NTS had received 40 written applications and a market was building. On August 19, a provisional Board of Governors met. Present were Tom Patterson (Chair), Anthony Adamson (Vice-Chair), Ongley, Moore, Gascon, Domville, and Thomas. Legalities needed to be met. The first item on the agenda was the naming of a Treasurer (ideally from Montreal because the Chair was from Ontario).<sup>81</sup> Claude Beaubien was so named. The Board also authorized a lease only for the Legion building at a maximum payment of \$35,000.<sup>82</sup> The long-term hope was to give the NTS Board an option to purchase within two years.

The Board at this point was officially seven members including Patterson, Bourassa, Adamson, Ongley, Senator Mark Drouin, Mavor Moore, and Robert Whitehead. Others invited to join at this meeting were business people, politicians, lawyers, journalists, educators, and arts

patrons including Otto Koerner and Dal Grauer from British Columbia, Eric Harvey and Dennis Yorath from Alberta, James Richardson from Manitoba, Tommy Douglas from Saskatchewan, Senator Finlay Macdonald from the Maritimes, Jane Massey, Lawrence Freiman, Joe Jeffrey, John Wayne, Alphonse Ouimet, Davidson Dunton, and Leonard Brockington from Ontario; Robert Fowler, Père Levesque, Paul Bienvenu, John Molson, Philippe Brais, D.W. Kerlin, Guy Roberge, Philip Bronfman, Joseph Breen, Claude Beaubien, and Wilfred Gagnon from Quebec.<sup>83</sup>

The first of the Executive staff to be officially employed was Powys Thomas—as Artistic Director of the English Acting Section, and Jean Gascon—as Executive Director. Both would be officially hired as of the previous June 1. James Domville, as the School’s Administrative Director, was contracted as of July 1.<sup>84</sup> Thomas was to be paid \$11,000 in his first year, Gascon \$5,500. Domville would receive \$4,000 for work from July 1 until November 30, and a new Administrative Director would replace him.<sup>85</sup>

By the end of August, Saint-Denis signaled his pleasure at the progress and happily returned to discussions with Powys Thomas of acting once again. In particular, he wanted to focus on improvisation.

you will have to be careful that the silent improvisation starts and develops in the right way. It should lead to tragedy, to an impersonal and classical kind of acting, if possible: the Americans and to a lesser extent, the Canadians have no experience of this kind of acting. It may prove impossible to convince them, but everything should be done to attempt it; particularly important towards French classical acting. They generally do Molière farces or broad comedies at which they are good...<sup>86</sup>

Saint-Denis advised Thomas that his wife, Suria, could visit early classes to guide them in understanding the ideas behind this type of improvisation, which Saint-Denis was suggesting required a certain level of external technique stemming from the classics and not North American ideas of psychological realism. Saint-Denis was obviously determined to maintain a unified vision among faculty, especially between the English and French sections. “You must

have meetings of the staff,” he went on, “sometime in advance to explain the training and bring unity to the different branches. Forgive me if I sound dogmatic: it does not come from any desire to repeat the past: the way of working must be adapted and not spoilt.”<sup>87</sup>

## **Two Months to Go**

By the end of August, a three-year plan was negotiated for the Legion building. In the first year, only a portion of the building would be leased. In the second year, the whole building would be taken over by the School. In (or before) the third year the building would be purchased.<sup>88</sup> Though space now seemed certain, many were starting to question the viability of a November opening. Nevertheless, Thomas wrote to Suria Saint-Denis that “the opening will take place.”<sup>89</sup> He asked if both Michel and she could be there. Thomas provided a list of hired staff, adding that they were still looking for part-time lecturers.<sup>90</sup>

Domville reported in mid-September that auditions seemed to be going well and that they had already found 30 students of high calibre with 40 to 50 more applicants still to be seen in the West.<sup>91</sup> “Today and tomorrow will most certainly provide the turning point in the career of some young players,”<sup>92</sup> wrote Herbert Whittaker in the *Globe and Mail* at this point. “The occasion...provides great satisfaction to those of us who have had for 10 long years now, the dream of a training centre for theatre on a national basis, with the inspiring Michel St. Denis as its mentor.”<sup>93</sup>

As expected, the majority of applicants were coming from Montreal and Toronto, but to everyone’s happy surprise, applications had also come from every province with the exception of Newfoundland.<sup>94</sup> By that point there were 102 applicants in total, 54 English and 48 French-speaking. Of the 54 English-speaking, 29 were men and 25 women, while from the 48 French-

speaking, 27 were men and 21 women.<sup>95</sup> According to reports from Domville, among the English-speaking applicants, the men were more promising while in the French group the women left a greater impression.<sup>96</sup>

Gascon wrote to Saint-Denis on September 23 finally suggesting Jean Pierre Ronfard—an actor and instructor of improvisation in France—for the Artistic Director position of the French Acting Section. Gascon wanted him and asked Saint-Denis to speak with him. He noted that it was worth going beyond the \$10,000 budgeted, perhaps going as high as \$12,000.<sup>97</sup> Saint-Denis said the \$12,000 was reasonable if they believed they had the right person for the job.<sup>98</sup>

Gardner wrote to Suria on September 27, saying the staff being put together “is an excellent one” and as far as students, “it seems probable that they will find a really good group of 30.”<sup>99</sup> One concern, however, was that the staff “might be too heavily French, but then there are not a vast quantity of English-speaking teachers available in Canada.”<sup>100</sup> Gardner also noted that Patterson was forming a “strong and highly respectable Board of Governors with great financial potential. So that end is being taken care of.”<sup>101</sup> As well, scholarships were emerging via a Canada Council grant of \$40,000. “All in all,” Gardner added,

once the teaching program is launched, I think the pieces will all fall into place. How wonderful it would be if either of you or both could be there for the first few months or weeks even, to co-ordinate and guide the teaching pattern. There seemed a possibility of this when last we met.<sup>102</sup>

Gardner pointed out that Saint-Denis had urged the School to have a good comprehensive theatre library “plays, essays, books, and articles on the theatre.”<sup>103</sup> The hope was that such a library be housed in the School and include donated theatre books from private collections.<sup>104</sup> As the opening approached, Gardner indeed began to wonder about the real possibility for such a library in year one:

I begin to wonder in my mind whether an all-embracing theatre library is not an unnecessary expense and undertaking for the School. A comprehensive reading

list and access to the public and university libraries in Montreal might better serve the function for 30 to 120 students.<sup>105</sup>

He wrote to Thomas, Gascon, and Domville:

Is there space for a library and... can a library be adequately supervised and run? Is there someone who would be available to be responsible for the library operation?...Perhaps the public and university libraries in Montreal could more adequately and less expensively serve the needs of the students? To duplicate the drama section of these libraries might be a wasteful expense.<sup>106</sup>

By October, Saint-Denis had met with Ronfard. He wrote to Powys Thomas, saying that “I feel pretty sure you will like Ronfard. He is young, 31... and he is a ‘Professeur agrégé’ [Associate Professor],”<sup>107</sup> who at that time was teaching theatre history in Vienna, as well as directing. Saint-Denis said that Ronfard wanted to come to Canada because

he is already tired of university work and finds in it a possibility to approach the real professional theatre. At the same time his knowledge, experience and background seemed to me right for the job. I believe he wants to experiment and can be original; he should be an asset....What I find healthy is that Ronfard comes because he wants to, he is neither after a job or after Nouveau-Monde money. I sincerely hope it will work. He reads English but...does not speak it—yet.<sup>108</sup>

Saint-Denis also wrote to Gardner and Patterson about Ronfard, saying “I have every reason to be confident in the man...I think he has knowledge and creative abilities; he ought to make a positive contribution.”<sup>109</sup>

Saint-Denis and Suria also agreed in early October to attend the opening of the School on November 2.<sup>110</sup> Suria, in fact, would arrive in Canada on October 16 with a plan to stay for at least six weeks after the opening to help with the School’s operations.<sup>111</sup> Specific plans were finally set in motion for the big day. On the other hand, two of the biggest hurdles remained: confirming that spaces in the building would be ready and confirming funding from the Ontario government.

## Weeks to Go

A final “final budget” was prepared in mid-October by Domville. Some of his figures were different than those in the Blueprint, though he sought to reflect aspects of the School that the Blueprint covered. “The blueprint,” Domville wrote,

is still useful for a more detailed breakdown of the various categories, though needless to say, there have been many minor changes since the blueprint budget was formulated. Inasmuch as most of the totals in my present budget are somewhat under the original sums envisaged by the blueprint, I feel the original blueprint budget is still useful in supporting my present figures and in explaining in more detail the general financial plan of the school.<sup>112</sup>

The final first-year budget:

### **Preliminary Expenses incurred or to be incurred by November 1, 1960**<sup>113</sup>

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| Rent and building expenses (including immediate renovations)                | \$ 3,420.10         |
| Administrative and office expenses  | 4,300               |
| Salaries  | 13,325              |
| Audition tour   | 1,400               |
| Purchase of equipment   | 2,050               |
| Preliminary expenses incurred prior to June 1 by the<br>CTC Pilot Committee | 42.47               |
| Miscellaneous   | 150                 |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$ 24,687.57</b> |

### **Operating Budget, November 1, 1960 to November 1, 1961**

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| Building expenses (Montreal and Stratford) | 17,500           |
| Administrative and office expenses         | 20,000           |
| Staff salaries                             | 66,750           |
| Audition tour                              | 2,500            |
| Transportation to Stratford                | 1,600            |
| Purchase of equipment                      | 2,500            |
| Miscellaneous and contingencies            | 2,000            |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>\$112,850</b> |

**Estimated Capital Expenses for Period November 1, 1960 to November 1, 1961**

Includes renovations to Canadian Legion Building, non-recurring purchases of equipment (i.e. sound and lighting equipment, classroom equipment, pianos, etc). Major expense is cost of establishing an experimental theatre within the Canadian Legion Building with a “very rough estimate” of \$40,000.

**Total** \$60,000

**Total Cost to November 1, 1961** \$197,537.57

**Revenue**

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Canada Council                            | 40,000 |
| Province of Quebec                        | 50,000 |
| Students’ fees (30 students x \$700)      | 21,000 |
| Amount hoped for from Province of Ontario | 35,000 |

**Total** \$146,000

Indeed, Domville’s budget demonstrates the fluctuation of numbers since the final Blueprint was ratified in February. To deal with the approximate \$52,000 deficit, the Board asked for \$35,000 from the Province of Ontario, \$30,000 from other Provinces, \$30,000 from Business and Industry, \$5,000 from Foundations, and \$6,500 from student fees.<sup>114</sup> If half of that came in—which it did—they would be on solid financial ground.

**Opening Soon**

By early October, Domville had to prepare invitations to go out for the opening events. A list was drawn up to include individuals who had helped in the planning process such as Roy Stewart and Pauline McGibbon. Ongley wrote to Domville, “they were the ones who did all the

early carrying in planning the School and were on the...Pilot Committee.”<sup>115</sup> Lady Eaton, another early supporter, also needed to receive an invitation.

Unfortunately, many—including Stewart, McGibbon, and Lady Eaton—sent regrets. Ongley himself, as well as David Gardner and Mavor Moore found they also had other business to attend to on the big day. Gardner wrote to Domville that he and Moore would be directing at the Crest Theatre at that time.

It pains me to report that I will not be able to attend the opening ceremonies on November 2...I think you will understand how deeply I would like to be there. Could you express my heartfelt regrets to Tom, Jean, Powys, Michel and Suria.<sup>116</sup>

Who would actually be there?

By the Board meeting the day before the official opening, support had not been confirmed from the Ontario Government or any other province. But most of the Executive Committee were feeling good for having gotten this far. Those who met on November 1 were Tom Patterson, Anthony Adamson, Yves Bourassa, Jean Gascon, Michel and Suria Saint-Denis, James de B. Domville, Powys Thomas, and Jean Pierre Ronfard. Patterson opened the meeting by stating that “The National Theatre School of Canada was the most important step forward to date in the development of Canadian theatre,”<sup>117</sup> a statement that would show up in papers across the country in the following weeks. He added that NTS was actually opening “two years ahead of a similar project in the United States [Juilliard].”<sup>118</sup> Juilliard, of course, began its planning earlier than NTS and had more financial support, facts confirmed by Saint-Denis. Patterson also acknowledged the very real financial squeeze saying that “he felt this problem was entirely capable of solution...”<sup>119</sup>



## The Opening

On November 2, 1960, the National Theatre School of Canada finally opened its doors. They had accepted 31 students,<sup>120</sup> 17 English-speaking and 14 French-speaking.<sup>121</sup> There were more males in the English Acting Section (9 to 8), and more females in the French Section (8 to 6).<sup>122</sup> Of the English-speaking students, 6 were from Montreal, 5 from Ontario, 2 from British Columbia, and one each from Nova Scotia, P.E.I, and Manitoba.<sup>123</sup> The average age of the English section was around 20, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest, 25.<sup>124</sup> On the French side, 12 students were from Montreal and 2 from Quebec, with the average age 21 (the youngest was 18 and the oldest, 24).<sup>125</sup> The next day's press release noted, "although talent was the sole criterion used in judging a given applicant, the Directors are particularly pleased at the nationwide representation of the student body."<sup>126</sup>

On November 2, the Board of Governors met at 11 am at the School's premises (1191 Mountain Street). This was followed by a formal lunch and a gathering with students and staff. At 4 pm came the speeches and a reception.

The morning Board meeting opened with Tom Patterson, as Chair, welcoming everyone—Anthony Adamson (Vice-Chair), Yves Bourassa (Vice-Chair), Joseph Breen, Davidson Dunton, Alphonse Ouimet, Jean Gascon, Suria Saint-Denis, Michel Saint-Denis, James de B. Domville, Powys Thomas, and Jean-Pierre Ronfard. Patterson began with a brief history of the planning of the School, followed by Gascon outlining the current artistic goals and introducing staff. He also expressed gratification at the "high calibre" of both the staff and the first year's students.<sup>127</sup> Domville then went through budgets. The Board also voted to accept French architect Pierre Sonrel to design the School's proposed theatre.<sup>128</sup>

At 4 pm, Michel Saint-Denis began the official opening ceremony, reaffirming that NTS was unique, a symbol of the development of the Canadian theatre:

The opportunity to train under one roof English and French-speaking students in all phases of the theatrical art, and in their respective traditions, is something that could happen in no other country. The creation of the school symbolizes the artistic maturity of theatrical people in Canada and of their sincere desire to assume their responsibilities toward the future.<sup>129</sup>

He then announced—using both languages: “I now declare the National Theatre School of Canada ouverte.”<sup>130</sup>

For the first year, the 31 students<sup>131</sup> were scheduled Monday to Friday from 8:45 am to 5 pm roughly as follows: movement (Rivest), voice (Diamant), improvisation (Hoffman), text (Ronfard and Thomas), diction (Brunot and Stewart), and interpretation (Ronfard and Thomas). History and text lectures took place on Wednesdays.<sup>132</sup> Each class was approximately one hour long with the exception of voice, movement, improvisation, and interpretation (acting), which ran for two hours daily.<sup>133</sup> All students trained together in voice, movement, and improvisation in one room with a bilingual teacher. Acting, however, was taught in language grouping along with the rest of the classes.

The actual order of classes changed daily, but interpretation (acting) was always reserved for the last class. In this sense, Saint-Denis stressed the importance of “tuning the instrument”<sup>134</sup> prior to performances, prioritizing technique and improvisation so to introduce students to ways of approaching aspects of style and acting. The one lecture a week reflects Saint-Denis’ insistence on actors having a background in history.

Early on, the plan was to have on staff a pianist, a wardrobe person, and a fencing instructor. There was not enough funding available so these positions had to wait until the following year. In the first year, the School could only afford to rent three rooms in the Canadian

Legion building, so space was at a premium, especially for rehearsals.<sup>135</sup> Of the seven instructors, three were bilingual, two were English-speaking and two French-speaking. The ratio of teachers to students was one to four. Indeed, Saint-Denis' training principles and the planning Committee's concept of a co-lingual national theatre school were reflected in most of the School's curriculum. Students only had an hour and fifteen minutes for lunch each day, suggesting the serious and rigorous nature of the School's training.<sup>136</sup>

### **Reflections on the Opening**

News ("reception" as Postlewait would call it) of the School's opening appeared that week in the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Ottawa Journal*, and the *Globe and Mail*. All quoted Patterson's statement that the School was "the biggest step forward in the development of a national theatre in Canada." The *Gazette* noted that the NTS was opened by Saint-Denis, Gascon, Thomas, and Domville.<sup>137</sup> The *Gazette* article was disappointingly short at two paragraphs on page 10.

The *Toronto Star*<sup>138</sup> and the *Ottawa Journal*<sup>139</sup> also acknowledged the School, and specifically Saint-Denis and Patterson. In those articles, the emphasis was not so much on the aims of the School as a major step in the development of the Canadian theatre, but rather on the names affiliated with the project. The *Ottawa Journal* actually described the new curriculum to some extent.<sup>140</sup>

Herbert Whittaker wrote a second article in the *Globe and Mail* on November 5, recounting the School's opening day with praise, calling it, as the Board had hoped, "a milestone in the history of Canada's theatre."<sup>141</sup>

In the five-story Canadian Legion Building on Mountain St. in Montreal, the country's first bilingual, national training centre for its actors, directors, and designers opened its doors. It was a happy occasion. M. St. Denis, who is the

artistic advisor, flew in for the occasion, an impressive board of governors assembled, and there were messages from the theatre greats of three countries.<sup>142</sup>

Whittaker noted that among those who wrote with congratulations were friends of Saint-Denis from England, France, and the United States—John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Michael Redgrave, Jean Vilar, and Robert Whitehead.<sup>143</sup> France’s actors Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault also wrote to their “Canadian Cousins.”

We are deeply aware of the encouragement and sense of purpose that the National Theatre School of Canada is bringing to Canadian theatre. We join wholeheartedly in support of our Canadian cousins in their present venture. It is our fervent wish that they will find the needed support to enable them to serve even better both their language and their art.<sup>144</sup>

Whittaker’s article traced some of the history.

Like any milestone, this one took time to reach. Almost seven years, in fact, of dreaming, plotting and planning. Much of that went on in Toronto, beginning when M. St. Denis resigned his post at the Old Vic School, an event which coincided with one of his visits in this country as adjudicator for the Dominion Drama Festival. The National Theatre School started back then. There were many delays. It now seems as if the school had to wait until Canada was seriously interested in establishing its identity and in the expression of that identity through its culture.<sup>145</sup>

He noted that in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth,

our greatest pride of accomplishments was to point to the lists of Canadians who had made good as actors on the stages of other lands. This proved that Canadians were as capable as anybody. It also seemed to prove that any actor who didn’t go away couldn’t be much good, an implication which did no good in the reputation of audiences of the ones that stayed.... there was no denying the fact that actors trained abroad were not keen to come back and pioneer in a bleak scene when they could test their worth and powers in a well-established commercial theatre.... Never before has theatre training been approached on this scope in Canada. The opening this week is plainly an event of major importance, of maturity, and the promise of great things in the future.<sup>146</sup>

Jean Pelletier’s own sense of the opening day was not so positive. He wrote to Saint-Denis on November 15 to express his disappointment, suggesting the ceremony itself seemed improvised.<sup>147</sup> His belief was that the Canada Council and the Quebec Government—the key financial supporters of the School—were virtually ignored, not a good sign.

C'est partir du mauvais pied. D'autant plus qu'on a lu un tas de message, mais qu'on a oublié (un détail!) de souligner les dons du Conseil des Arts et du Gouvernement du Québec. Seulement \$90,000. Cela ne vaut pas la peine! (It moved at a bad pace. Especially since a ton of messages were read but it was forgotten (a detail!) to emphasize the donations of Arts Council of Quebec Government. Only \$90,000. It wasn't worth the trouble).<sup>148</sup>

Pelletier also suggested that neither McGibbon nor Stewart were actually invited to the opening ceremony.

Saint-Denis ultimately responded to Pelletier. "Je suis fâché que vous avez eu une si mauvaise impression de l'ouverture de l'Ecole." ("I am upset that you had a poor impression of the opening of the School").<sup>149</sup> Saint-Denis confirmed that Gascon had approached him that morning "d'accompagner cette ouverture de quelques mots." ("To accompany the opening with a few words").<sup>150</sup> But he agreed with Pelletier that the Canada Council and Quebec government should have been more fully acknowledged.<sup>151</sup> He also agreed that McGibbon and Stewart should have been treated with more care. "Nous avons fait ce que nous avons pu pour arranger les choses." (We did what we could to arrange things").<sup>152</sup>

Saint-Denis agreed with Pelletier that the opening event and some of the other planned aspects of the School gave the impression "d'une improvisation."<sup>153</sup> He reassured Pelletier, however, that based on his own personal experience, it was quite normal for things to start in such a way. With good direction and management, however, they should improve.<sup>154</sup>

Pauline McGibbon also wrote to Saint-Denis after the official opening. "Please do not be upset by either my non-attendance at the opening or the fact that I am not on the Board,"<sup>155</sup> she wrote. She assured him that she would not have been able to attend in any event since she was away.<sup>156</sup> That said, she noted pointedly that had she been a Board member she would have made a greater effort to attend. McGibbon also noted that perhaps there was still a hesitation to involve the nation's amateurs in such a project.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, internal politics never ceased within the

various planning groups. Her final words: “now it is over [and] let us hope it is well launched...”<sup>158</sup>

Clearly, problems still lay ahead for the NTS and its leaders, particularly the conflict between the amateur and professional theatre communities, the contradiction between the School as an artistic endeavour and as a viable financial venture, and the difficulties of continuing to depend for staff on many from abroad. The next chapter will look just a bit further in time to see which of these problems continued and which would take much longer to resolve.

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<sup>1</sup> David Ongley, letter to Yves Bourassa and Jean Pelletier, February 24, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Newspaper Clipping, "Quebec Cultural Grants of \$350,000 Made," *Gazette*, March 16, 1960, 19, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> David Gardner, letter to Michel Saint-Denis, March 17, 1960, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Gardner, letter to Jean-Louis Roux, March 17, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Jean Pelletier, April 23, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>17</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gardner, April 13, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Ongley, letter to Saint-Denis, April 20, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>19</sup> Ongley, letter to Davidson Dunton, May 5, 1960, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>20</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Ongley, May 16, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>21</sup> Ongley, letter to Roux, May 18, 1960, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Ongley, letter to Saint-Denis, May 20, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, as Executive Director, Gascon was overseeing the entire school, not just the French Acting Section as French Artistic Director. The decision to make Gascon Executive Director is a bit curious since he was already running the TNM. However, as the French Artistic Director, his responsibility would perhaps be greater since he would be focused on teaching and his students, as opposed to supervising the School's overall operations.

<sup>25</sup> Press Release, May 30, 1960, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>26</sup> Herbert Whittaker, "Show Business: Two-Tongued Theatre School Set," *Globe and Mail*, May 31, 1960, 4, accessed September 15, 2015,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1288405078/68FAE14F1C1B4E7DPQ/1?accountid=15182>.

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- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> “National Theatre School Established in Montreal,” *Gazette*, May 31, 1960, 9, accessed September 24, 2015, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Fr8DH2VBP9sC&dat=19600531&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ongley, letter to Dwyer, June 3, 1960, 1-2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>33</sup> Gascon, letter to Saint-Denis, June 7, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gascon, June 15, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.-Denis
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1-2.
- <sup>38</sup> Powys Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, June 24, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>39</sup> Ongley, letter to Roux, May 18, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>40</sup> Mavor Moore, letter to Roux, June 18, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>41</sup> Clipping, article by Moore, “Canada’s Theatre School has National Scope,” *Telegram*, June 24, 1960, n.pag., F0359, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ongley, letter to John Bassett, July 13, 1960, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Promotional Booklet, “The National Theatre School of Canada,” n.d., 3, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.
- <sup>46</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Thomas, July 25, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>48</sup> Dwyer, letter to Ongley, July 27, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 27, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1-2.



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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>57</sup> No names of the hired staff were recorded in the meeting minutes.

<sup>58</sup> Meeting Minutes, July 27, 1960, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Whittaker, "Show Business: National Theatre School Launches Its Campaign for New Home," *Globe and Mail*, August 24, 1961, 9, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1284678044/6E5F21F32D846F0PQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>67</sup> According to Philip Spensley's brief history of the NTS, Gascon was heading both the NTS and his TNM in 1960 (42-43). At his small office, he divided his desk into separate sections, one side for his NTS work and the other for TNM. Indeed, they were two separate organizations and clearly, Gascon kept them separate. But might this separation suggest that he approached his work with them differently? Was this because he felt they were on different levels? Could the NTS be considered a professional theatre school at that point for Gascon and did he ever bring his TNM work into the School's practices, or vice versa? No clear answer could be found in the archives, though perhaps a detailed analysis of Gascon's involvement in both organizations could be done in future.

<sup>68</sup> Philip John Spensley, "A Description and Evaluation of the Training Methods of the National Theatre School of Canada, English Acting Course, 1960-1968," (PhD Diss., Wayne State University, 1970), 43, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/dissertations/docview/302555310/5E73C9FDB5CA41BCPQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>69</sup> Bourassa, letter to Moore, July 28, 1960, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>70</sup> Jack Campbell, letter to Ongley, August 1, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>71</sup> Ongley, letter to Canada Council, August 2, 1960, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Considering the negative reactions to Patterson's report, it is somewhat curious that he was made first Chair of the School's Board of Governors. It is uncertain as to how francophone Committee members felt about Patterson's new role as Chair, as no indication of their responses was found in any document. It is likely, however, that Saint-Denis felt that Patterson was the right person for the job because of his work successfully establishing the Stratford Festival. Although Patterson's report was a miss with the Committee, it was agreed by many that he was capable of running a professional organization. Indeed, a good leader and businessman was what the planner's needed to start their School.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, August 18, 1960, 3, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

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- <sup>75</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, August 8, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>77</sup> Thomas, letter to Saint-Denis, 18 Aug., 1960, 2.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> Meeting Minutes, August 19, 1960, 1, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>86</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Thomas, August 23, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>88</sup> Meeting Minutes, August 30, 1960, 2, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>89</sup> Thomas, letter to Suria Saint-Denis, September 2, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>91</sup> James de B. Domville, letter to Ongley, September 19, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>92</sup> Whittaker, "Show Business: Theatre School Opens the Way for Talent," *Globe and Mail*, September 12, 1960, 28, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1288408331/C3BFBC2E28044DB1PQ/1?accountid=15182>.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>94</sup> It is important to ask, however, if Newfoundland was not represented at the auditions because of what lacks there, as Whittaker suggests, or if it was due to the planners' inability to publicize the School all across Canada. Did the planners prioritize where they would publicize first? No specific answer to this was found.
- <sup>95</sup> Whittaker, "Show Business: Theatre School Opens the Way for Talent," *Globe and Mail*, September 12, 1960, 28, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/news/docview/1288408331/560264D3ADF441A3PQ/26?accountid=15182>.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>97</sup> Gascon, letter to Saint-Denis, September 23, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>98</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Gascon, September 30, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>99</sup> Gardner, letter to Michel and Suria Saint-Denis, September 27, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Gardner, letter to Patterson, October 7, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>106</sup> Gardner, letter to Thomas, Gascon, Domville, October 7, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Archive, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>107</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Thomas, October 9, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Patterson, October 6, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>110</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Françoise Weymüller, October 7, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Domville, letter to Anthony Adamson, October 19, 1960, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>113</sup> It is important to note that the original document from which this budget came contained two erroneous calculations: the Preliminary Expenses total was originally written as “\$25,167.47” and the Estimated Capital Expenses total “\$198,017.47.” Such errors suggest that everything about the planning process appears to have been rushed.

<sup>114</sup> Adamson, letter to Patterson, October 24, 1960, 1, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>115</sup> Ongley, letter to Domville, October 24, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>116</sup> Gardner, letter to Domville, October 26, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>117</sup> Meeting Minutes, November 1, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Philip Spensley’s dissertation, “A Description and Evaluation of the Training Methods of the National Theatre School of Canada, English Acting Course, 1960-1968” notes that 32 students were accepted (18 English-speaking students and 14 French students). No other documents regarding this discrepancy could be found in the archives to confirm if it was, in fact, 32 students. Newspaper articles and other documents note that only 31 students were accepted into the first year. Either way, it is clear that there were more talented applicants in Canada than anticipated by Saint-Denis, who originally doubted they would find even 30 talented students.

<sup>121</sup> Press Release, “Successful Candidates Announced for Acting Course of National Theatre School of Canada,” n.d., Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>122</sup> Chart, “Accepted Applicants-National Theatre School of Canada-Acting Course-November 1960,” n.d., Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Press Release, "Successful Candidates Announced for Acting Course of National Theatre School of Canada."

<sup>127</sup> Meeting Minutes, November 2, 1960, 1, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Press Release by Domville, November 2, 1960.

<sup>130</sup> Whittaker, "Show Business: Theatre School is Milestone," *Globe and Mail*, November 5, 1960, 13, accessed August 18, 2015,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1288425867/562347F6E78F4713PQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>131</sup> Accepted students and their ages (in brackets) for the English Acting Section: William Armstrong (21), Peter Cullen (19), Paul Hecht (23), James Langcaster (Heath Lamberts) (25), Gary Learoyd (19), Edward Rudney (22), Lionel Simmons (21), Donnelly Henry (24), Neil Dainard (20), Suzanne Grossman (22), Sabine Von Fircks (21), Martha Buhs (Martha Henry) (22), Marilyn Fleming (19), Madeline Kronby (19), Coralee Pugh (18), Cynthia Karasevich (22), Chela Matthison (18); Accepted students and their ages (in brackets) for the French Acting Section: Guy Boucher (22), Pascal Desgranges (23), Gaston Dussault (22), Michel Forget (18), Andre Lauriault (21), Jean-Luc Tetreault (21), Jacqueline Auger (19), Monique Belisle (18), Liliane Dufour (21), Isabelle Jan (19), Anne Lauriault (19), Diana Leblanc (17), Jacqueline Rhealt (22), Lisa Tondi (24) (Press Release, "Successful Candidates Announced For Acting Course Of National Theatre School Of Canada," n.d., Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University).

<sup>132</sup> First Fall Timetable, November 1960, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> "A Plan for the Establishment of the National Theatre School of Canada-Ecole Nationale de Théâtre du Canada," February 8, 1960, 22-23, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>135</sup> Roux, Michel Garneau, Thomas Hendry, *l'École: Le Premier Quart de Siècle de l'École Nationale du Théâtre du Canada/ The School: The First Quarter of a Century of the National Theatre School of Canada*, (Montréal: Stanké, 1985), 21.

<sup>136</sup> First Fall Timetable, November 1960.

<sup>137</sup> "National Theatre School Starting," *Gazette*, November 3, 1960, 10, accessed September 23, 2015,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=Fr8DH2VBP9sC&dat=19601103&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

<sup>138</sup> "Theatre School Lauded," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 3, 1960, 36, accessed September 23, 2015,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/hnptorontostar/docview/1428387606/853A19C16797444APQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>139</sup> "Tom Patterson Lauds National Theatre School," *Ottawa Journal*, November 5, 1960, 74, accessed September 23, 2015,

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<http://www.newspapers.com/image/41531737/?terms=Tom%2BPatterson%2BLauds%2BNational%2BTheatre%2BSchool>.

<sup>140</sup> “Students Working Hard at New School,” *Ottawa Journal*, November 19, 1960, 42, accessed September 23, 2015,

<http://www.newspapers.com/image/41534433/?terms=Students%2BWorking%2BHard%2BAt%2BNew%2BSchool>.

<sup>141</sup> Whittaker, “Show Business: Theatre School is Milestone,” *Globe and Mail*, November 5, 1960, 13.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Promotional Booklet, “The World’s a Theatre,” n.d., 2.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Whittaker, “Show Business: Theatre School is Milestone.”

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Pelletier, letter to Saint-Denis, November 15, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Saint-Denis, letter to Pelletier, December 13, 1960, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> McGibbon, letter to Saint-Denis, November 17, 1960, 1, Michel Saint-Denis Fonds, National Theatre School of Canada.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

# Chapter Six

## Into the Future: Perspectives and Final Thoughts

The conclusion of this dissertation has three aims: 1) to answer the unresolved questions surrounding the NTS' permanent home and its funding from Ontario and other provinces, 2) to identify some of the overall successes and failures of the first year of operations, and 3) to suggest that the founding of the National Theatre School of Canada provided a new baseline for the emergence of today's professional theatre in Canada.

When the NTS opened in November 1960, the School was simply renting rooms at the Canadian Legion Building. Though space was limited, it was sufficient for the 31 acting students and seven teachers involved. By fall 1961, however, another 30 acting students enrolled, as well as 15 in the new production course.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the School eventually rented out the whole Legion building, but it was quickly realized that by 1963 they would need still more space, especially since third year students were required to put on public performances.<sup>2</sup> At this time, the planners put down a deposit of \$5,000 on the Legion building toward a possible purchase, but negotiations failed.<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Legion Building proved too expensive to buy, let alone renovate, and it lacked the necessary equipment including lockers, showers, and most obviously, a proper theatre.<sup>4</sup>

By 1963, the new multi-million dollar Place des Arts was about to open and the School was offered a chance to work in the Grande Salle. It "seemed ideal," said historian Philip Spensley, and "there was even talk of building special adjoining facilities..."<sup>5</sup> The NTS moved into the space in June of 1963 to prepare for its fall term in November. After only a week into the fall term, however, the School was forced to leave. According to Spensley, the Place des Arts

cancelled their contract with the NTS because Place des Arts needed more space itself. Could something have been done to anticipate this all before year one began? Clearly, a lack of solid finances and solid financial planning early on became a continuing issue.

Fortunately, shortly after leaving Place des Arts the NTS found and settled into 407 St. Laurent, renting out the building's top three floors. The Community Players Theatre Library came in as part of the deal and officially became affiliated with the School.<sup>6</sup> Yet even this did not solve the NTS space issue as the building was being shared with the Quebec government—the Quebec Bankruptcy Court, the Quebec Provincial Employment Service, the Department of Lands and Forests, the Provincial Bureau of Statistics, and the Quebec Retail Lumber Dealers Association.<sup>7</sup> By 1965, the School needed to rent another floor at 407 St. Laurent—which it managed to do—and it remained there for the next seven years.<sup>8</sup> Even then, though, there was no theatre connected to the School, forcing productions to take place in a variety of venues around the city including the facilities used by the Théâtre de l'Égrégore.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the NTS nearly became homeless at several points as it continually struggled to find affordable, well-equipped facilities.

In 1965 the situation improved when the mostly abandoned Monument-National<sup>10</sup> at 1182 Saint-Laurent became available for rent.<sup>11</sup> At 70,000 square feet, the Monument-National provided two dressing rooms, office space, storage, and a 1400-seat auditorium.<sup>12</sup> The theatre reopened with performances by the School's two companies—one French and the other English. The groups came from the graduating class of 1964.<sup>13</sup> In 1978, the NTS bought the Monument-National<sup>14</sup> for \$412,000.<sup>15</sup> It was not until 1970 that a building became available for the School at 5030 rue Saint-Denis.<sup>16</sup> A 44,000 square foot facility, the former Quebec Juvenile Court

building was leased to the NTS by the province for \$1 a year.<sup>17</sup> In the late 1990s, the NTS bought the facility with help from the Quebec government.<sup>18</sup>

Today, the School continues to maintain both buildings (5030 rue Saint-Denis and the Monument-National) along with a library of some 80,000 books, manuscripts, DVDs, newspaper files, programs and posters. The library collects materials in both official languages.<sup>19</sup>

## **Funding**

Though the NTS had difficulty finding a permanent home, its various financial crises were perhaps its longest and most daunting off-stage struggle. Deficits were continually life threatening and remained so for years. Again, the Quebec government was its continuing savior. As for student support, as was agreed among the founders that no talented student should be rejected from attending the School due to a lack of finances, this was the policy from the beginning. When the School opened, 21 of 31 students needed help paying their tuition.<sup>20</sup> This meant that \$16,050 was needed for tuition and \$6,000 for student living.<sup>21</sup> By December of the first year, only \$2,000 was able to be covered by bursaries.<sup>22</sup> The rest of the funds came directly from the staff who contributed their own salaries. In fact, Powys Thomas, Jean Gascon, and James Domville made continuing contributions for years according to Spensley.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually, the Ontario government started contributing \$25,000 annually.<sup>24</sup> In 1964, Ontario increased its contribution to \$50,000.<sup>25</sup> That year, the School lowered tuition fees from \$700 to \$500.<sup>26</sup> A year later, an emergency one-time grant of \$36,000 was provided by the Canada Council.<sup>27</sup>

It was not until 1970 that other provinces began supporting the School.<sup>28</sup> Today, the School receives an annual operating grant of nearly \$5 million and is supported by all the



provinces, the Canada Council, and a variety of federal ministries including the Ministry of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.<sup>29</sup>

## **Stratford and Summer Courses**

According to Jean Pol Britte, then Administrative Director of the NTS, the first summer at Stratford (1961) was a successful one.<sup>30</sup> Located at the Stratford Collegiate Institute from July to August, classes took place outdoors, providing a relaxed atmosphere for the students.<sup>31</sup> Finding cost effective accommodations, however, was, as anticipated by Saint-Denis, the biggest issue which never really got resolved.<sup>32</sup>

By 1966, the Board had to reduce the number of students working in Stratford because of a shortfall in finances.<sup>33</sup> In 1967, the NTS Board decided to reduce the time at Stratford to a single week of seminars, seeing productions, and meeting with actors and directors. Production students, on the other hand, continued to have an opportunity to get hands-on experience, spending July, August, and September at the Festival.<sup>34</sup> NTS also discovered quickly that the proposed Special Summer Course for Amateurs at Stratford was not feasible, again because of finances. As James Domville succinctly put it, “there was neither the funds, the interest, nor the time.”<sup>35</sup>

Today, the School no longer collaborates with the Stratford Festival, though every two years in the early fall English-speaking students from NTS are taken to see productions. In intervening years, they visit the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake on the same basis.<sup>36</sup> In 2014, the French section also began to participate in those visits to Ontario.<sup>37</sup>

The Spensley and Britte historical accounts of the NTS, published in the NTS’ celebration volume of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, detail a number of ongoing issues at the School.

Indeed, *l'École/The School* contains the most thorough account of the NTS' first 25 years of operation. The book is relatively free-form, moving through separate untranslated articles in both languages. Its publisher was Jean-Louis Roux, who wrote in explanation of that choice:

it reflected the reality of a co-lingual school where there is no simultaneous translation or automatic adaptation; instead, the School respects the ideal that our two cultures, our two traditions, can move forward together along parallel lines. I decided therefore to publish each chapter in the language of its author—a decision, I am certain, guaranteed to produce a maximum of criticism on all sides. We live in a paradoxical country and there is nothing wrong about admitting the fact.<sup>38</sup>

As a result, the two separate histories, each in their own language and each with their own perspective, reflects the way bilingualism itself was perceived at the time the School was established. That is, two separate but equal views of everything. Like NTS, *l'École/The School* suggests that 1) the differences and tensions between the two languages at NTS continued to exist and are very real even today; and 2) reading both of those early, separate quasi-official histories together give genuine insight into the realities of competing cultural traditions, a situation created by the School's early planners for good and bad.

## **Reflections on a Precarious Venture**

The National Theatre School of Canada, without doubt, was always a precarious venture. The core training vision came from the idealism and real experiences of Michel Saint-Denis. He believed such a school offered the potential to develop a style of professional theatre unique to a bi-cultural nation, as well as a way to keep Canadian artists in the country. The dream was honourable; the reality unproven.

The first year of the School's operations did not take place in an effective space, and faculty and students worked with real financial pressures. Too few classrooms were available

and there were generally too few resources. An ideal curriculum set out by Saint-Denis was certainly outlined in the School Blueprint, but there was little time in the planning process to ensure that it was really being followed.

As for Saint-Denis himself, he was everywhere and nowhere. Always noted in newspaper articles and acknowledged as *the* consultant, his physical presence was occasional at best. Was he then the real “architect,” as imagined by his Canadian colleagues, or was he simply an “advisor,” or, as he himself put it, a mere helper? There is no doubt that Saint-Denis—a stocky, poised, bow-tied figure with a humble spirit—had a knack for creating positive relationships and instilling confidence in others. He had an extraordinary gift too for teaching, directing, and developing professional standards, particularly in students. One could argue that without his commitment to the ideal of a Canadian theatre, the National Theatre School of Canada might never have happened. But even today—five decades later—the jury is still out on what his exact role in the School’s establishment was, though hopefully an answer is clarifying somewhat through this documentation of the long process.

The fact is that the planning Committee literally begged Saint-Denis for input throughout the planning, yet, as the opening approached, decisions were often made without him. Did the devotion of the NTS Committees get in the way of progress at times? It would seem so. But his bilingual vision, his extraordinary background and professional and pedagogical experience seemed to imbue the planners with enough confidence to create what might be called a shared understanding of the potential as well as the realities needed.

Yet, there was also that fundamental need for foreign assistance in general, an impulse to look abroad for help in order to develop the Canadian theatre toward new professional standards. At that time, these professional standards could only be taught beyond Canadian borders,

creating a sense of insecurity in the Canadian consciousness that not much could be developed in their adolescent country. The emergence of the amateur and semi-professional theatre companies proved there was interest in theatre in Canada, yet it also proved that to achieve a higher level, actors, directors, and teachers needed to go to the roots of Canada's English and French cultures in order to develop an indigenous, bi-cultural style of theatre of high quality. Interestingly, while the dependency on foreign influence deprived the Committee of its confidence at times, the cultural politics between the francophone and anglophone members—which also stunted the planning process on numerous occasions—actually had a salutary effect on much of the decision-making process.

Certainly the timing for it all was right and Michel Saint-Denis saw an opportunity in Canada to realize his dream of a multi-cultural, bilingual training school which could bring into being a multi-cultural, bilingual theatre. Though he agreed only to advise rather than to take a really active part, his decision meant that Canadian planners really did have to take matters into their own hands, finding their own way to shape their own path.

At some point in the planning the DDF (and Canada's amateur theatre community) was simply given up on. Related to this, people who could have made a financial difference like Pauline McGibbon (she was well-connected in the business community), were gradually excluded. And why was there not more excitement over the School's ultimate establishment, especially in Montreal? Saint-Denis dreamed of a new style of bi-cultural acting unique to Canada. It clearly never happened at the NTS. Was Saint-Denis' dream compromised by finances and politics? Or was it unrealistic?

In an examination of Malcolm Black's 1977 *Report on Theatre Training in Canada*, Diana Belshaw and David Fancy pose questions touching on this—do theatre training programs

in Canada accurately define their objectives to students? Do such schools really have appropriate Boards to oversee and report on progress? Does the training actually prepare students for the professional theatre? Do the schools' curriculums, faculty, and student body really reflect Canada's cultural and theatrical needs? These are real and good questions for the NTS to answer even now.

Examining the history of the NTS as the first truly professional, bi-cultural theatre school in Canada through this type of historiographical framework has provided, I believe, a deeper insight into Canadian theatre training programs that have emerged since that time, and a deeper and more critical discourse in areas including cultural identity and the evolution of notions of professionalism in the Canadian theatre. In theorizing such an approach, Postlewait emphasizes context—the state of the Canadian theatre at the time as people such as Saint-Denis found it; the agents of the change, an understanding of the major players who were involved; and reception, the ways in which the NTS was itself perceived at the time of its opening. That is, Postlewait urges a close look at the artistic heritage, the cultures and traditions on which the NTS concept of “national” was based in an effort to more effectively understand how the School contributed to and was influenced by the cultural politics of the time. As Postlewait notes,

in the process of constructing a theatrical event, as we have seen, there are many possible meanings that might be attributed to any one of the contexts. The potential contexts provide a way to establish relationships between and among events. By placing events in a relational dynamic, within a specific time and space, we can offer plausible explanations for their relationships. In turn, by examining their sequential patterns, we can attempt to explain some of the causes and reasons for change. Moving beyond chronology, we attempt to explain the relationships between theatre [the NTS] and society. Sometimes there are mutual interactions. Sometimes social and political conditions control artistic practices. Sometimes artistic developments influence and change societies. The lines of causality are complex.<sup>39</sup>

In the end, this first in-depth attempt at documentation of the complex processes leading up to the establishment of the National Theatre School of Canada in 1960 will provide a firmer

base for future researchers to examine questions like these even more deeply, emphasizing with more certainty the ongoing relationship between politics and culture as it has and continues to manifest itself in so many theatre endeavours.

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<sup>1</sup> Spensley noted that in 1961, 31 additional acting students began attending the school and 12 production students for the new production course. Britte, however, wrote that 30 acting students and 15 production students enrolled that year, making the total student body 71. I have used Britte's numbers since he had a first-hand account of the School as its Administrator Director.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Spensley, "A Brief History of the National Theatre School of Canada," ed. Jean-Louis Roux, Michel Garneau, and Tom Hendry, *l'École: Le Premier Quart de Siècle de l'École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada/ The School: The First Quarter of a Century of the National Theatre School of Canada*, (Montréal : Stanké, 1985), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Pol Britte, "Chroniques de l'École Nationale de Théâtre du Canada," *l'École/ The School*, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Spensley, "A Brief History," 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> "Brief History," *National Theatre School of Canada*, accessed October 22, 2015, <https://ent-nts.ca/en/about/history/?tab=0&tab2=6>.

<sup>7</sup> Spensley, "A Brief History," 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>10</sup> From the 1880s until the 1940s, the Monument-National was the hub of many rallies and performances, mostly for Montreal's French-Canadians and the Jewish community. After World War II, however, the area around Boulevard St. Laurent started getting a reputation for prostitution, gambling, and trafficking, and eventually with the emergence of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, the Monument-National became abandoned (Jake Bleiberg, "Montreal's Le Monument-National: The Incredible History of the Theatre That's Seen Over 100 Years," *The Main*, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> No records of the rent amount for the Monument-National were found in the Spensley's, Britte's, or archival accounts.

<sup>12</sup> Spensley, "A Brief History," 48-50.

<sup>13</sup> Britte, "Chroniques de l'École," 34.

<sup>14</sup> Being in a dilapidated state, however, the Monument-National eventually went through major renovations in 1993, acquiring two theatres, the Ludger Duvernay Theatre with 804 seats and the 150-seat Studio Hydro-Québec, a versatile café and performance space, as well as the 55-seat cabaret space La Balustrade, a meeting and reception room, a rehearsal space, and a set and costume shop.

<sup>15</sup> "Brief History." *National Theatre School of Canada*.

<sup>16</sup> Today the building is known as the Michel and Suria Saint-Denis Pavillion.

<sup>17</sup> Britte, "Chroniques de l'École," 37.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Barry, email message to author, October 15, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> "Scholarship Situation of Accepted Students," n.d., F0359, Mavor Moore Fonds, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Spensley, "A Brief History," 23.

<sup>24</sup> Britte, "Chroniques de l'École," 38.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Britte did not specify which provinces contributed financially to the school. He mentioned, however, that three of the donations were “symbolic” amounts.

<sup>29</sup> “Brief History,” *National Theatre School of Canada*.

<sup>30</sup> Britte, “Chroniques de l’École,” 35.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Philip John Spensley, “A Description and Evaluation of the Training Methods of the National Theatre School of Canada, English Acting Course, 1960-1968,” (PhD Diss., Wayne State University, 1970), accessed September 22, 2015, 39, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/dissertations/docview/302555310/5E73C9FDB5CA41BCPQ/1?accountid=15182>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>36</sup> Simon Barry, email message to author, October 15, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Simon Barry notes that while this is the case, no explanation for why the English-speaking students went to Stratford and Shaw while the French students did not. There might be political reasons, though the whole point originally was to ensure that both French and English students could engage with the professional English-speaking theatre in Canada.

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Louis Roux, forward to *l’École / The School*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Postlewait, introduction to *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 196.



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