

## Manitoba Theatre Centre: A Brief History

- 1957 John Hirsch and Tom Hendry form Theatre 77, a semi-professional theatre.
- 1958 Theatre 77 merges with Winnipeg Little Theatre, an amateur theatre group, to form MTC, under the artistic directorship of Hirsch and the administration of Hendry. The concept of the theatre as a centre of community activity was important to both men, so they established a theatre school, play-reading groups, and city and provincial tours. The theatre's first home was the Dominion Theatre at the corner of Portage and Main.
- 1958 *A Hatful of Rain*, directed by John, is the first play produced at MTC.
- 1960 MTC relocates to the Beacon Theatre on Main Street while the Dominion's roof is repaired.
- 1960 MTC launches its first regional tour.
- 1960 A second stage named the Studio Theatre is established.
- 1961 MTC launches its first summer series, with *Bus Stop*, *Rope*, *The Tender Trap* and *The Tunnel of Love*
- 1964 MTC establishes the Jean Murray-Moray Sinclair Scholarship for post-secondary theatre students.
- 1965 Zoe Caldwell stars in MTC's internationally-acclaimed production of *Mother Courage*.
- 1968 The Dominion is demolished to make way for the Richardson Building. MTC relocates to the Centennial Concert Hall while they build a new theatre at 174 Market Avenue.
- 1969 MTC's second stage and theatre school move to the Warehouse Theatre at 140 Rupert Avenue.
- 1970 The new MTC Mainstage Theatre on Market opens in November with Bertolt Brecht's *A Man's a Man*, directed by John Hirsch. The theatre's permanent home, designed by Allan Waisman, seats 785 and is built at a cost of \$2.8 million. The theatre was to have featured complete production facilities for the creation and storage of sets, properties, wardrobe, and wigs, as well as administrative offices. With Phase One of the construction complete, staff move in and make do with the existing space on the assumption that the situation is only temporary. However, MTC is unable to raise the money needed to carry out Phase Two.
- 1974 MTC produces *Godspell*, an enormous box-office success, selling out the entire 3.5-week run, and two additional performances.
- 1974 John Hirsch directs his original adaptation of *The Dybbuk*, which goes on to become an international triumph, touring across Canada and into the United States.
- 1976 The Naomi Levin Scholarship Fund is established to assist students who have demonstrated the ability and interest to pursue a career in the technical aspects of professional theatre.
- 1976 MTC launches a season that breaks box-office attendance records. *The Crucible*, at 97% capacity, has the highest attendance of any MTC drama to date.
- 1980 Arif Hasnain directs Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, featuring young talents Tom Hulce and Kathleen Turner.
- 1988 MTC founds the Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, attracting attendance of 30,000 in its first year.

- 1988 Extensive renovations to the MTC Warehouse Theatre include updated technical facilities, a new stage, improved seating and lobby, and an increase in audience capacity to 300.
- 1989 Steven Schipper directs *The Mousetrap* and breaks all previous attendance records for regional tour attendance (13,426).
- 1989 MTC appoints Steven Schipper Artistic Director.
- 1991 The Broadway hit *Les Miserables* at the Centennial Concert Hall is offered to MTC theatre-goers as part of the 1990/91 season. Subscription sales increase 20% over the previous year and total attendance at MTC is over 200,000.
- 1992 MTC develops and stages the world premiere of Maureen Hunter's *Transit of Venus*, the first original Mainstage play in 25 years to have been written by a Manitoban.
- 1993 MTC presents the Canadian premiere of Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, which goes on to win five Dora Mavor Moore Awards, including Outstanding Production.
- 1993 Maureen Hunter is appointed MTC's Playwright-in-Residence. Her play, *Transit of Venus*, is produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-Upon-Avon, England.
- 1994 MTC's 94/95 season breaks subscription sales records, with 17,600 subscribers at both stages.
- 1995 Keanu Reeves stars in *Hamlet* and, for the first time, a production is sold out before opening. 26,000 attend, including 1,000 non-Manitobans, from as far away as Argentina and China.
- 1995 The MTC co-production of *Poor Super Man* receives four Dora Awards.
- 1995 *Romeo and Juliet* more than doubles previous student attendance records, playing to 12,799.
- 1995 Subscriptions at the MTC Warehouse increase by 38% when MTC programs *Angels in America, Part 1*. The production enjoys a sold-out run and a one-week extension.
- 1996 Steven Schipper directs the world premiere of Maureen Hunter's *Atlantis*.
- 1996 The BBC broadcasts a radio adaptation of *Transit of Venus*.
- 1997 *Atlantis* is nominated for a Governor General's Award.
- 1997 MTC's critically-acclaimed production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, starring Judd Hirsch, breaks all previous box-office revenue records for the theatre.
- 1998 After MTC announces the new Warehouse season, two plays win the Pulitzer Prize: *How I Learned to Drive* in 1998 and *Wit* in 1999.
- 2000 MTC raises \$5-million to upgrade both theatres.
- 2001 MTC's *The History of Manitoba from the Beginning of Time to the Present in 45 Minutes* receives the coveted Prix Manitoba Award - Arts for Education and Communication.
- 2001 MTC launches an annual mid-winter festival dedicated to the work of a master playwright, beginning with BrechtFest.

- 2001 The Historica Foundation presents MTC's *History of Manitoba* at the national history teachers conference.
- 2002 MTC breaks previous Mainstage subscription records when it announces a season that includes *Richard III*, starring William Hurt.
- 2002 The Manitoba Bar Association receives a National Post Award for Business in the Arts for its innovative 12-year fundraising collaboration with MTC.
- 2002 MTC celebrates 25 consecutive years of annual touring in Manitoba and NW Ontario.
- 2004 Season favourite *My Fair Lady* plays to audiences totalling over 25,000 – the largest overall attendance for a single production in MTC history.
- 2005 MTC presents TremblayFest, the first festival ever to showcase the work of Michel Tremblay.
- 2005 *Bigger Than Jesus*, which premiered at MTC in 2003, wins three Dora Awards.
- 2006 *Mating Dance of the Werewolf*, which premiered at MTC in 2004, is nominated for an Edgar Award.
- 2007 The 20<sup>th</sup> annual Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, **Winnipeg Fringe: 20 Years to Life**, takes place in July and attracts a record-breaking 71,921 visitors to the indoor venues.
- 2007 Two actors receive Dora Awards for their performances in MTC productions: Seana McKenna for her role as Lady Torrance in *Orpheus Descending*, and Adam Brazier for his role as Frank-n-Furter in *The Rocky Horror Show*.
- 2008 MTC celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary season with a record-breaking number of subscriptions (over 20,000 between the Mainstage and Warehouse theatres), a world premiere (*Shakespeare's Dog* by local playwright Rick Chafe, in co-production with the National Arts Centre) and the achievement of a huge financial goal (the MTC Endowment Fund reaches \$10 million).
- 2008 In honour of World Theatre Day on March 27, MTC compiles a list of **50 Significant Canadian Plays** with the participation of prominent theatre professionals from across the country.
- 2008 At the Homecoming celebration on May 11, Artistic Director Steven Schipper announces the renaming of MTC's stages in honour of co-founders John Hirsch and Tom Hendry: the Mainstage becomes the **John Hirsch Theatre at the MTC Mainstage** and the Warehouse becomes the **Tom Hendry Theatre at the MTC Warehouse**.
- 2008 On June 3, MTC stages a special performance of *The History of Manitoba from the Beginning of Time to the Present in 45 Minutes* for Prince Edward, Earl of Sussex, and a group of local high school students.
- 2008 The 21<sup>st</sup> annual Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, **Viva Las Fringe**, breaks all previous festival attendance records with 72,722 Fringers taking in paid performances, and 88,000 enjoying the entertainment on the Outdoor Stage (including the highest-ever total for Kids Fringe attendance, at 47,775).
- 2008 On November 10, MTC officially unveils a commemorative sculpture of co-founders John Hirsch and Tom Hendry. Generously supported by Babs and Gail Asper and Michael Paterson, and the Johnston Group in honour of Marjorie Johnston, the life-size bronze, called **'Imagine, MTC'**, was created by artist Ruth Abernethy and permanently installed outside of MTC's box office doors.

- 2009** Opening April 30, MTC presents the North American premiere and first professional production of the **Andrew Lloyd Webber/Ben Elton** musical ***The Boys in the Photograph***. *The Boys in the Photograph* was developed from the hit musical *The Beautiful Game*, which opened in London in 2000 and received the prestigious Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical. Ben Elton, writer of the book and lyrics, directs the MTC production and thus spends seven weeks in Winnipeg during rehearsals and after. Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber visits Winnipeg to watch a couple of performances and hold a music rehearsal with the orchestra.
- 2009** The Tom Hendry Theatre at the MTC Warehouse season closes with the World Premiere of local playwright/actor/producer Kevin Klassen's ***Bleeding Hearts***. Kevin is the Artistic Co-Chair of **Shakespeare in the Ruins** and was the first recipient of **The Harry S. Rintoul Memorial Award for Best New Play at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival** for his play *Aftertaste*. *Bleeding Hearts* is the first new local work in almost 20 years to play on the Tom Hendry stage.
- 2009** MTC is designated a **National Historic Site of Canada** by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The recognition is based on the architecture of the building at 174 Market Avenue and MTC's role as a model regional theatre.
- 2009** The 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, **Fringe Factory: Mass producing originality since 1988**, smashes its paid attendance records once again, welcoming 81,565 Fringers to performances throughout the 12-day festival and breaking the record for the highest overall ticket sales in Winnipeg Fringe history and for any Canadian Fringe Festival. Although the Outdoor Stage numbers drop overall, Kids Fringe (which celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year) breaks its all-time record with 53,810 in attendance.
- 2010** The Tom Hendry Theatre Warehouse season closes with the World Premiere of New York playwright Robert Lewis Vaughan's ***Looking Back – West***.
- 2010** The John Hirsch Theatre Mainstage closes the season with ***Steel Magnolias***, starring **Cindy Williams** of *Laverne and Shirley* fame and **Susan Clark** of *Webster* fame.
- 2010** The 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, **Fringe and Beyond: Going where no Fringe has gone before**, once again breaks the record for most ticket sales in Winnipeg Fringe history, with 86,717 Fringers attending shows. More than 80,000 people attended the Outdoor Stage in Old Market Square and \$600,698.75 was returned to performers, an increase of more than \$64,000 over last year's revenue.
- 2010** MTC is given **royal designation** by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. At a ceremony at the Manitoba Legislature on October 26, Premier Greg Selinger announces the designation. As the oldest English-speaking regional theatre in Canada, MTC is honoured with the title **Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre**.
- 2011** The North American premiere of the British hit ***Calendar Girls*** comes to the John Hirsch Theatre Mainstage from March 17-April 9 as a co-production with Mirvish Productions. *Calendar Girls* playwright **Tim Firth** comes to Winnipeg to make script changes and help in rehearsals. Directed by **Marti Maraden**, the cast includes **Fiona Reid**, **Barbara Gordon** and **Fiona Hight**.