

METROPOLIS

The Métropolis gets a makeover

Montreal, Thursday, Sept. 12, 2002 - The Métropolis is presently undergoing major renovations that will enable Montreal's oldest concert hall to be used to its full potential. The work includes upgrading its already-fine stage area, notably with the installation of sound and lighting equipment intended to better meet the needs of performing artists and, above all, the general public. Among the benefits of this makeover will be improved acoustics, enhanced comfort and exceptional sight lines from all corners of the hall, in which the audience will now be able to sit during cabaret-style shows.

The sole survivor of the era of the great, mythic theatres along Ste-Catherine St., the hall closed its doors in August but not for long, because its reopening is scheduled for mid-October.

The reconversion of the Métropolis into a concert hall represents an overall investment of \$5 million and (a rarity in the Quebec cultural-facilities sector), more than half of the expense, in the amount of some \$2.7 million, has been assumed by a private firm, L'Équipe Spectra. The Gouvernement du Québec and the City of Montreal are also participating in this major project; the ministère de la Culture et des Communications is contributing \$1.3 million as part of the concert-hall support program announced by SODEC (Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles); the ministère des Affaires municipales et de la Métropole is giving \$525,000 and the City of Montreal is contributing \$250,000 (\$200,000 from the borough of Ville-Marie and \$50,000 as part of Programme Opération Commerce).

These financial contributions will make it possible not only to purchase high-calibre equipment and convert the site into a more versatile facility - both essential factors in its hosting a wide variety of productions - but also to carry out standards-compliance work. Such work is indeed important because it helps save - over the short-, mid- and long term - valuable jobs within the Montreal cultural sector. Indeed, if not for this major initiative, this superb facility was certain to close. Thus, a creative public-private partnership will have the historic hall back in operation and, at the same time, revitalize a key area of Ste-Catherine St. in the heart of the future entertainment district.

This magnificent monument, which opened in 1884, welcomed many great personalities, including the legendary Sarah Bernhardt, before being used for various purposes during the past century. Partly destroyed by fire, it became Le Théâtre Français prior to undergoing numerous transformations. It served as a large movie theatre in the 1980s and as a discothèque in the 1990s. During this last makeover, the seating was remodeled, which reduced visibility and comfort during the presentations of shows. Both these key aspects will be greatly improved thanks to the work in progress. Upon acquiring the property in the late '90s, L'Équipe Spectra returned the Métropolis to its initial vocation as a concert hall, with the location being reserved for rock artists whom audiences preferred to see standing up.

As the only hall of its size in Montreal, the Métropolis when compared with the many newer, high-performance halls often almost entirely financed by the state, definitely deserved a number of improvements given its low economic value as a facility rented out to concert producers and not used as a bar-discothèque the rest of the time. Not only will the renovations preserve the site's historic integrity, they will use to best advantage its stunning canopy ceiling, its stage screen designed by Emmanuel Briffa and its impressive ornamental proscenium while retaining the architectural features within its enormous interior space.

The planned changes will make the Métropolis a more versatile facility, easily accommodating a standing audience of 2300 (as was already the case) and 1200 seated spectators during cabaret-style shows. The stage will be equally adaptable for concerts featuring singers, concept shows and musicals, the latter being able to run for several weeks thanks to a system of booms and borderlights for theatrical presentations. With its new makeover, the Métropolis will take its place among Montreal's fine concert halls, and the artists who perform there and the audiences who enjoy their shows will be the prime beneficiaries. Long live the Métropolis!