



*Massey Hall*

**SHINE**  
**A LIGHT**

# HISTORIC HALLS OF NORTH AMERICA

*How does Massey Hall compare?*

**NAME:** Walnut Street Theatre  
**CITY:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
**OPENED:** 1809  
**CAPACITY:** 1,054

The oldest continuously operating theatre in North America, focusing primarily on drama, it was the first to install gas footlights (1837) and air conditioning (1855). It's also rumoured to be the site of the first curtain call.

**NAME:** St. Lawrence Hall  
**CITY:** Toronto, Ontario  
**OPENED:** 1850  
**CAPACITY:** 1,000

A community hub and performance space preceding Massey Hall, it fell into disrepair and disuse for much of the 20th century before being designated a National Historic Site in 1967.

**NAME:** Grand Opera House  
**CITY:** Macon, Georgia  
**OPENED:** 1884  
**CAPACITY:** 2,418

In 1908 it staged a production of *Ben Hur* with real horses and chariots, on a treadmill. It was reduced to a movie house for 30 years before extensive renovations began in the late 1960s.

## CARNEGIE HALL

**CITY:** New York City  
**OPENED:** 1891  
**CAPACITY:** 2,804

Like Massey Hall, Carnegie Hall was built by a philanthropic industrialist, and its history is synonymous with the evolution of a city and the musical history of a country. Like Massey, it was threatened with demolition in the 1960s. It was renovated extensively in advance of its centenary in 1991 and today retains its place as the most prestigious venue in the U.S.

## MASSEY HALL

**CITY:** Toronto, Ontario  
**OPENED:** 1894  
**CAPACITY:** 2,753  
(reduced from original 3,500 in 1933)

This is the longest continually operating performing arts centre in Canada, and second only to Carnegie Hall as the largest of its age in North America.

**NAME:** Royal Alexandra Theatre  
**CITY:** Toronto, Ontario  
**OPENED:** 1907  
**CAPACITY:** 1,497

The oldest continuously operating theatre in Canada to focus primarily on drama, it was scheduled for demolition in the early 1960s before it was bought by Ed Mirvish.

**NAME:** Royal Theatre  
**CITY:** Victoria, B.C.  
**OPENED:** 1913  
**CAPACITY:** 1,416

Originally a performing arts centre that hosted the likes of Sarah Bernhardt, it was a movie theatre from 1930-72, and is now home to the Victoria Symphony.

**NAME:** Imperial Theatre  
**CITY:** Saint John, N.B.  
**OPENED:** 1913  
**CAPACITY:** 908 (reduced from original 1,500)

A vaudeville theatre turned movie house, it served as a gospel church from 1957 to 1982 and officially reopened in 1994.

**NAME:** Théâtre St-Denis  
**CITY:** Montreal, Quebec  
**OPENED:** 1916  
**CAPACITY:** 2,218 (St-Denis 1), 933 (St-Denis 2)

Multi-purpose venue showcasing French-language performing arts. A second hall was added in 1963.

**NAME:** Kodak Hall at Eastman Theater  
**CITY:** Rochester, N.Y.  
**OPENED:** 1922  
**CAPACITY:** 2,400  
(originally 3,352 before renovations)

Built by the founder of Kodak on the University of Rochester campus, this was built for music, dance and silent films. Today it's used primarily for student performances.

**NAME:** Orpheum Theatre  
**CITY:** Vancouver, B.C.  
**OPENED:** 1927  
**CAPACITY:** 2,688

Opened as a movie theatre and vaudeville house, it's the current home of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

## FIXING UP THE TOWER OF SONG

*Preserving the past with an eye to the future.* By Jamie Bradburn



**F**ix everything, change nothing." For architect Marianne McKenna and those working on bringing Massey Hall into the 21st century, this sentiment reflects the balance of improving the facility and respecting its heritage elements and the memories accompanying them. The end result, she hopes, is a multipurpose facility whose feel is authentic rather than artifice.

While elements such as the plaster ceiling and Moorish-style arches will be restored, the character and patina the hall developed over the past 125 years will remain intact. "We should be wary not to clean it up too much," McKenna notes.

“It will be a sensitive, strategic revitalization of the hall,” McKenna says. “We’re upgrading for the long term in terms of its technical upgrades, opening the stained glass windows, repairing and reinstating lighting where it should be rather than where it went expeditiously, and making it functional for the next generation.”

experience that patrons have come to expect in the auditorium.

Patrons should be impressed by the new look at the entrance, including a more accessible box office area and the restoration of the original front signage. External walkways wrapped around the second and third levels will connect patrons to the new south tower, where



*The architect's early rendering of the proposed revitalization.*

A recipient of the Order of Canada and a founding partner of KPMB, McKenna’s work in Toronto’s performance sector includes two venues at the Royal Conservatory of Music, Ettore Mazzoleni Hall and Koerner Hall. She found many comparable qualities between Koerner and Massey, from seat spacing to the reciprocal enjoyment of audience and performers. McKenna discovered that “many things we were able to achieve at Koerner Hall actually already exist at Massey Hall.” Though Massey has earned a reputation as a great performance space, McKenna has worked along with world-class acousticians and sound engineering consultants, to find areas to improve upon the acoustical experience for those on stage while maintaining the exceptional aural

elevators and additional bars and bathrooms will improve the overall Massey Hall experience. Aesthetically, those walkways will act, McKenna says, as “arms that reach out and hold the original heritage building.” As she told the *Globe and Mail* recently, “The movement through a building is as important as the spaces within them.”

McKenna thinks the revitalization project will bring a new buzz to the site. “Massey Hall presents itself very honestly,” she observes. “What we get to do by adding the new building is make that room work for the 21st century.” She hopes that with more options to hold events like lectures and public meetings, the revisions will restore its past role as “a town hall in the middle of downtown.”